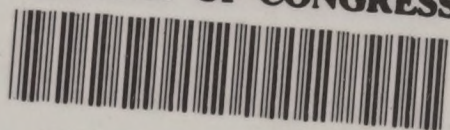


THE DAY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

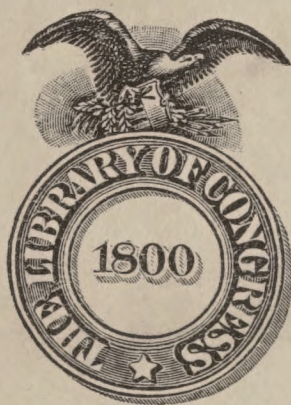
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Author of "TWICE-BORN MEN,"
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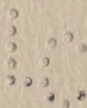
BY

HAROLD BEGBIE

AUTHOR OF "TWICE-BORN MEN,"
"SOULS IN ACTION," "OTHER SHEEP," Etc.

The imagination of most men lags behind
their knowledge, and it is often long before
the real meaning dawns upon them of what
they think they know, and in a sense do know.

The Observer.

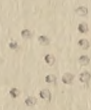


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“ Master, which is the great commandment?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

CHAPTER I

A PERSONAL STATEMENT

MANY persons whose opinions are generally respected have urged me to write a narrative of those recent and miraculous events which have completely and so far as we can see permanently transformed civilisation. I should, therefore, feel myself guilty of a serious selfishness if I any longer withheld my knowledge from mankind. But I cannot bring myself to publish even anonymously my experience of the Afflatus, as some now call it, without disowning as publicly and earnestly as possible any pretensions whatever to a particular spirituality. I would not have the world to think for a moment that at the time of the visitation I was either worthy in myself or by my manner of living had in any way fitted myself to be the recipient of a divine message. And to this end I would preface my narrative with the following brief but essential statement concerning my disposition and my mode of existence.

When I came down from Oxford in 1891, I was conscious only of a desire to hold myself aloof from all active work in the world and to spend my life in quiet and detached observation of my fellow-men. I was interested in life, but not in love with it. My father was anxious for me either to join the Diplomatic Service or to enter the House of Commons. His friendship with the leading men of both parties would have made entrance to either career a matter of but little difficulty, and indeed I was even urged by Mr. Gladstone on two rather memorable occasions to become a politician. But a certain nervousness, a certain distaste for public appearances, rendered any idea of political life extremely obnoxious to my mind, and as for the Diplomatic Service I knew very well from my father's experience that such an existence was more often than not extraordinarily dull and tedious. I did not, it is true, covet a life of action, but I shrank from a life of *dossiers*.

My income, though a small one, enabled me to live with all the comfort I desired, and I made my head-quarters in Hertford Street, occupying a couple of rooms in a house owned and furnished by an ex-butler. I took my breakfast in these rooms, lunched as a rule at one of the three clubs I had joined on leaving Oxford, and either dined

by myself in a restaurant or at the house of my father, who was then too ill to go out and who liked to have his children about him. I read a great deal at this period of my life, went very regularly to concerts, and fairly often to the theatre, saw something of famous men, listened to the great preachers, and spent a considerable time in exploring—but only tentatively and superficially—the by-ways, the backwaters, and the depths of London.

In a few years my acquaintance was so numerous that it was only with real difficulty that I could keep a few hours in the day for privacy. At that period people in London were the slaves of their engagement books, and I suppose no man of affairs was ever more engaged and mortgaged to other people than the idlers of society. For a year or two I enjoyed this almost incessant contact with distinguished humanity, going so far as to keep a journal of my encounters, and contemplating quite seriously the ultimate publication of my memoirs. But gradually I lost interest in the turmoil of this fatiguing and feverish existence, and began, I must confess it, to entertain something very nearly approaching contempt for most of the men and women who passed in the public estimation for pioneers of civilisation. I grew more and more jealous of my privacy. I found a deeper and

deepening pleasure in solitary explorations of London streets. I hunted out obscure restaurants. I loved to find places where I could sit alone and observe mankind. I became, in fact, a recluse of the modern order, a bachelor by temperament, and a hermit by experience.

Every year I went abroad for a few months, and I took at this time a rather serious interest in the literature of foreign countries. I cultivated French literature quite earnestly, but abandoned it for the literature of Russia and Germany, with which I still maintain a fairly thorough acquaintance. I was all for reality, and no charm of style, not even the French of Anatole France, could entrance me with a story that bore no living relation to actual experience. At the same time I was disgusted by books whose reality was restricted to the mere lusts of the flesh. I was something of an agnostic in religion, but I cherished the greatest reverence for the principles of Christianity, and was intellectually convinced of the existence of God. No book that was obviously sensual could capture my attention. I wanted reality, but I wanted it wholesome.

In 1908, with the advent of a new Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, I became a really serious student of politics. I woke up, as it were,

from the long and pleasant dream-life of my former existence. I think I was one of the first men in England to perceive that the ancient play of party politics was at an end, and that the actual battle of Conservatism and Radicalism, involving the whole fabric of the social order, had at last begun. I remember making a remark of this kind to the most distinguished of Conservative statesmen, and his reply, which was light-hearted and bantering, showed that he anticipated no change whatever in the political life of England. "If you knew the Treasury officials as well as I do," he said, "you would know that even Mr. George is mortal."

At the end of 1909 I was writing on political questions, and by 1912 I had established something of a reputation as a political critic. I went out more frequently into society. I enjoyed the friendship of several prominent politicians on both sides of the House of Commons, and was acquainted with nearly every man actively engaged in political life. For three years I was practically obsessed by politics.

It was not, indeed, until the autumn of 1912 that I questioned for a single moment the immense and pressing importance of politics. I would have the reader kindly to bear in mind that until the middle of October, 1912, I was one of the men

who anticipated an overwhelming crisis in the political life of England, and who spent almost their entire life in seeking to avoid national calamity. We believed that revolution was at hand, not armed and desperate revolution, but revolution by Act of Parliament. We believed that no precedent and no tradition would have the smallest authority with a democracy fired only by the materialistic determination to increase their luxuries and broaden their welfare. Our plan of action was to check the storm and to secure breathing-time for ourselves, first by detaching the Labour Party from the Liberal Party, and then by forming a coalition of moderate Liberals and advanced Conservatives. Many of us were by no means opposed to some of the aspirations of the Labour Party, but we believed that the extreme Socialists in their reckless ignorance of international trade and international credit would bring the Empire, geographically and commercially, to irretrievable ruin, thus plunging the whole world into war.

I never once thought of religion during these years, at any rate not in relation to the political crisis. I never addressed a prayer to the Almighty, so far as I can remember, for divine guidance in our national existence. I went seldom to church, saw scarcely anything of the clergy, and read nothing

either of a theological or ecclesiastical character. I was occupied solely, entirely, and exhaustively by politics, and though I made no effort to enter the House of Commons I was convinced that my life would henceforth be interwoven, however humbly and obscurely, with the political destinies of England. No man, except perhaps a victim of animalism, could have been less worthy of a divine revelation.

This personal statement, I am told, would be incomplete without some positive affirmation touching my moral life. I must content myself by merely saying that I have never felt the force of animal temptations, that I have been from my boyhood of a benevolent nature, that I have always been greatly moved by suffering and sorrow, that I have always hated violence, dogmatism, and self-assertion, that I have ever regarded the teaching of Christ with the very greatest admiration and reverence, that I have sought to make men and women with whom I came into close contact better and not worse for my friendship, and that I have felt—sometimes pressingly, and sometimes only subconsciously—both the seriousness of human life and the immense responsibility of the individual. I say all, I think, when I say that I have never been without the sense of God. I have not worshipped,

I have not prayed, and I have not been active in religious life ; but I have always acknowledged in the solitude of my soul a humble and grateful dependence on the mercy of God.

Finally, let me say that my mother, who died in 1907, was deeply, earnestly, and practically religious. She was a constant visitor to a mission in Plaistow, worked incessantly for the Ragged School Union and Dr. Barnardo's Homes, and was one of the first women in society to countenance and assist the Salvation Army. With all her wonderful common sense and brightness of disposition, she was something of a mystic. But I never heard her speak either of vision or dream.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST INTIMATION

ON Friday, the 18th of October, 1912, St. Luke's Day, I received a telegram at breakfast-time from an acquaintance whose name had better not be mentioned, asking me to dine with him that evening. This telegram was followed an hour later by an express letter from the same man, telling me whom I should meet at dinner and assuring me, with a degree of emphasis which seemed to me rather excitable, that a matter of the most urgent and of the gravest possible character would be discussed at this meeting.

The names mentioned in this letter were those of rather second-rate politicians. One of the men, for instance, was a particularly reckless representative of the Ulster Orange Party. The writer, however, was a man of marked originality and of no small influence in the world of political journalism. I knew him slightly, and although I disliked the violence of his writings and regarded him as a very dangerous person in a really serious crisis, I

could not hide from myself that he was far more likely than myself to emerge and play a governing part in the whirlwind of a revolution. For some time I debated whether to accept or to refuse the invitation, but finally I decided to accept it, if only to discover what course of action the daring spirits of Conservatism were now contemplating.

I shall mention the plot disclosed to me at this dinner-party in order to show how wild and disorganised were the wits of men on the very eve of the great change. I have obtained permission from its author to make this disclosure, and I believe that it will be of serious interest to the future historian. Nothing, I think, could more vividly demonstrate the confusion of the times and the hopeless condition of party politics.

The proposition solemnly made to me by the gentlemen at this dinner-party was nothing less than a proposition for a *coup d'état*. I was asked to agree that the resources of Parliamentary opposition were exhausted, that against the advancing legions of illiterate democracy the single regiment of culture was powerless, that history afforded no illustration of a victory by logic and reason over a revolution on the march. Washed down by a little indifferent claret these postulates were allowed to pass, and then, with whisky and tobacco, and the

absence of servants from the room, came the theory of the *coup d'état*.

“Force,” said our host, “is the only weapon we can now employ. But we ourselves cannot summon it to our aid. We must use Force, but we do not possess Force. What then can we do? *Our defence is the Throne*. The Throne must act. And the Throne, far from being, as so many foolish people suppose, a part of the Constitution without vital energy, or without even the ability to act decisively, in fact possesses the one overwhelming weapon of offence. The King of this country commands the Navy. He has but to give the order for the Royal Navy to blockade England, to hold up, that is to say, our food supplies for a week—he has but to do this, to bring the country to its knees. And such an action, remember, would be welcomed by at least one half of the community. Do not let us forget that. One half of the population is sick of revolution by Act of Parliament, is sick of closure and gag in the House of Commons, is sick of democracy, is sick of all these Radical experiments which unsettle and paralyse national existence. Liberty has lost its spell. Parliament is ridiculed and hated. One half of the country would hail with rejoicing and delight any action by the King which promised a restoration of order and common sense. The

Army would rally to his side. The House of Commons would become a bear garden. Ministers might issue orders from their offices, but no one would be found to obey them. In a week democracy would be howling on its knees for bread. And then—revolution! Yes, a real revolution. Instead of government by cabinet, and county council, and board of guardians, and all the rest of this preposterous, unwieldy, unscientific, and utterly inefficient apparatus of democracy, we should have a government of aristocracy—such a government as the British Government in India. Governors and Commissioners would succeed local bodies. We should have committees of one. Things would be done swiftly and efficiently. The King's Government, like the Kaiser's Government, would be a real Government, yes, and immovable. Men like Kitchener would direct our land forces with no restriction on their decisions except the King's veto. Men like Willcocks, and Lugard, and John Hewett would organise our industries and develop our resources. Such prosperity would come to us from this efficiency, that men would soon look back on the chaos and confusion of the democratic period with wonder and amusement. All that we need is courage and fortitude for the first step. I am convinced, yes, on my soul I am convinced, that

a declaration by the King at this moment that for the safety of the Empire and the welfare of his dominions, he intended to dissolve Parliament *sine die*, would be greeted with acclamation. There would be a few scuffles with military and police, but nothing more. The mob is unarmed. The wealth of the country is against it. Socialists might rave, but there are prisons enough for all the firebrands of Tower Hill. A stoppage of food supplies, and the appearance of sailors in the streets and ships at the mouth of every river, would settle the business in a week. Socialism would die out, or it would be crushed out of existence. All that we have to do is to take the country utterly by surprise. We must act—and suddenly, swiftly, completely.”

One of the men present, evidently disappointed by the way in which I received this amazing suggestion, began to hold forth with a distracting violence of tone and gesture on the alternative destiny of England. The House of Lords, he said, was destroyed. The Throne would follow. Land was now definitely to be nationalised. Capital was leaving the country. It meant mob law in England, a destruction of all culture and refinement, a crowning of materialism, disruption of the Empire, and Armageddon. “It means anarchy and ruin,” he

vociferated, "anarchy and ruin for the working-classes as well as for us. India will be seized by a foreign power, and with the loss of India England's trade perishes at once and for ever. These Radicals are starving the Navy ; the point is almost reached when Russia, Japan, and Germany will make a rush for India. And the country that holds India rules the world. Unless we act at once the Empire will fall with a crash, and we shall all be buried—upper-classes, middle-classes, and lower-classes—in its ruins. The Radicals, ignorant of world conditions, and reckless in their home market, think that they can go on raising wages, lessening hours of employment, penalising capital, and exposing industry to the free competition of Asiatic and sweating nations, without ruin to themselves. It is the maddest gospel ever preached out of Bedlam. And it is not merely preached ; it is actually in action. And while it is in action, we do nothing but talk ! We argue in the House of Commons. We plead in our newspapers. We abuse and ridicule our opponents at meetings of the Primrose League ! And we think we are fine fellows. No, by Heaven, we are fools, cowards, madmen. Unless we act, all is lost. And unless we act at once, only the remnant of our glory can be saved. We must go to the King."

I need not give an extended account of the conversation that followed. It was now excited and vociferous, now depressed and cynical, now pleading and pathetic. I withdrew as soon as possible, saying that whatever might be the wisdom of the proposition it was quite certain that the King would never act in the manner suggested. Everything, of course, turned on the King; and I expressed my absolute conviction that he would refuse to countenance for a single moment a step so entirely revolutionary and false to his oaths. In brief, I refused to be the agent of these plotters, and begged them to abandon all idea of any *coup d'état* whatsoever until after the next General Election.

On my way back to Hertford Street, while I was reflecting on the danger which menaced the social organism in the violence of such Conservatives as those I had just left—a violence more dangerous than the violence of demagogic oratory—my eyes, in looking up from the ground as I crossed Trafalgar Square, were strangely and suddenly attracted by the face of a child. I can recall distinctly the very marked and instant effect produced upon my mind by this encounter of the eyes. Everything about which I had been thinking so seriously and carefully evaporated from my consciousness. I ceased thinking abruptly and completely. I seemed to

begin at that moment not so much a new train of thought as a new manner of feeling. I remember that my heart felt as if it had been pierced. An excess of deep and extraordinary compassion overwhelmed me. I was conscious of a really hungering desire to shelter and protect this child whose eyes encountered mine. Nothing in the whole world appeared to me then of such infinite importance as the welfare of this child.

It was carried by a very tired and ragged woman, its head just above her left shoulder, its face looking backward. Behind the woman was a boy of five or six years of age, whose broken boots dragged as he walked, and whose left hand clutched at his mother's skirts. Somewhat in advance of the boy marched the father, his hands at the lapels of his coat, his head raised, his shoulders squared, the whole gait and carriage of the man soldier-like and proud, but vehement and exasperated.

The infant's face was white as death, and the expression of the eyes was one of mute suffering. They were large dark eyes, but without lustre, without animation. They did not seem to see me, though they were fixed upon me. The jolting of the woman's paces produced no change in the fixity of these eyes, which were set in suffering, which were frozen in acquiescence. I walked behind the

group and studied the little pale thin face with that sentiment of unusual and extraordinary pity which I have attempted to describe. I felt that it was in my destiny to follow these poor people. I felt that in some way my fate was bound up with the fate of this child.

They went up St. Martin's Street towards Leicester Square. It was just a few minutes after eleven o'clock. Groups of people stood outside the still lighted windows of stationers' and chemists' shops. From the light of these windows I saw that the family I followed was hideously and appallingly poor. The clothes were indescribably horrible. The glimpses I got every now and then of the profiles of father and mother showed me that they must be actually starving. When they passed on into the darkness between the lamps they seemed to become a part of the night, a part of the city; but in the light they seemed incongruous, inhuman, quite positively dreadful.

As I followed them, still looking at the child's eyes, and as it were drawn by that pitiful stupor, I remember that a line from Dostöevsky's novel of the Karamazovs came suddenly into my mind, the cry of Mitya in his dream, "Why is the babe poor? . . . Why are they so dark from black misery? Why don't they feed the babe?"

At the recognition of these words as a quotation my feeling of compassion became more rational. Something of my old nature reasserted itself. I began to speculate. It seemed to me a very monstrous thing that in spite of laws and charities, in spite of all the immense wealth and unceasing labour of London, this poor child should be out in the streets at night, not only homeless, but visibly and uncomplainingly dying of starvation. I thought about industrialism, and the amazing pass to which it had brought human life. I thought of agitators and demagogues, of the Primrose League and the plotters I had just left, I thought of the revolution we were all expecting and the horror of universal war that might so naturally follow an upheaval in England—and I wondered whether something might not have been done long ago, something which was now too late to do, something which might have saved this child from perishing of want at the very centre of London.

“Why is the babe poor?” I asked myself again and again. And I felt that there was an answer to the question, but that I did not know it. I was surprised, calmly and rationally, that I had no answer to the question. It seemed to me that everyone ought to know it. It seemed to me that the Almighty was Himself asking England

that question, "Why is the babe poor?"—and that England could not answer.

The family in front of me suddenly checked. I stopped too. The man, walking on ahead, had paused at the entrance to a music-hall. He stood, looking into the lighted vestibule, his hands still grasping at the lapels of his coat. His wife drew alongside, looked for a moment into the bright and gorgeous interior, and then moved on, the little boy dragging at her skirt. But the man remained there, all his shabbiness visible in the flood of light.

I observed the stretched tightness of his skin over the cheek-bones, the grim expression of the mouth under its moustache, the hollows of his cheeks, the burning hatred of his dark eyes, and the leanness of the hands grasping his coat lapels. He stood looking into the luxury and gilded ostentation of the music-hall with defiance and challenge, as though he desired people to see his rags, not at all as if he anticipated a dole. I was very much struck by a certain grandeur in the man's attitude, and watched him with interest.

A motor-car drew up beside the pavement. From the steps of the music-hall came quickly and with obsequious alacrity a tall janitor in elaborate livery. He was followed by an old man and a young

woman. The old man wore his opera hat tilted towards his eyes, and carried a light-coloured overcoat over his arm. His face was red, shining, and stupidly hilarious. He was dressed like a boy, with white waistcoat, a fanciful shirt, pointed-toed shoes of patent leather, and white gloves. There was a flower in his button-hole. The girl was thinly clad in pale pink, and had yellow hair. She wore a very large black hat decorated with black and white feathers. As she came down the scarlet carpet and across the pavement she lifted her skirt almost to her knees, disclosing pale stockings and gilt shoes. Those trivial and vulgar shoes seemed to me as I stood there quite devilish and malicious.

The janitor on his way to the motor-car ran against the starving man standing upright and defiant with his hands clutching the lapels of his shabby coat. The janitor pushed him and said, "Get out of the way, you!" The old gentleman at that moment, putting his cigar in his mouth, began feeling in his pocket for a tip. I heard the jingle of coins. The girl glanced at the beggar for a moment, and then with a little nod and smile to the janitor entered the motor-car. As her companion, after examining a handful of coins with a drunken amusement, was giving his tip to the saluting janitor, the beggar, who had recovered

his balance, muttered something that I could not hear, angrily and bitterly. His wife, looking round, called him ; but he stood where he was, his eyes flashing.

The janitor, pocketing his tip, measured the beggar with his eyes, and said to him, "Take your fleas out of this, or I'll put you away, quick."

The man walked towards him. "I'd sooner starve than do your dirty job," he said threateningly. Then he shouted something at the janitor which I will not write.

His wife called him, loudly, eagerly.

The janitor beckoned with his head to a couple of policemen standing with their backs to the railings and the printed bills a few yards away. Before they could approach, the beggar suddenly threw himself upon the janitor. I caught sight, as his arms whirled, of the South African ribbon on his waistcoat. His face was terrible in its fury. . . .

The woman, crying bitterly, followed him to the police-station. For some yards I marched with the crowd behind her. The babe's eyes were again fixed upon mine. The dazed stupor was unchanged. The look of suffering acquiescence was unaltered. I looked at the little face on the shoulder of the mother and in the midst of the laughing

crowd, till I could bear it no longer. I drew alongside of the poor mother, slipped a couple of sovereigns into the hand that held the babe, and escaped to the kerb as quickly as possible. Then I hailed a cab and drove home, feeling guilty of something which tortured and reproached me.

“Why is the babe poor?” I asked myself, and each time I asked that question it seemed more and more true to me that I knew why it was poor, and that I dare not say.

It was some time before I could sleep, and when I did sleep it was for less than an hour. I woke suddenly from a dream. And this dream was the first intimation I received, I do not even now like to call it an inspiration, of the wonder that was coming to the world.

My mother often told me that during a period of my childhood I obstinately refused to go to bed until I had been carried and placed in the window-sill of our day nursery. There I used to sit, wrapped in a blanket, my hands holding on to the iron bars, my feet dangling outside, my eyes fixed upon the sunset. I used to sit there, she told me, sometimes crooning softly to myself, but more often than not in perfect silence and without any movement of my body, simply staring into the western heavens until I dropped asleep. Then the nurses

would carry me into the night nursery, and I would sleep soundly and sweetly till daybreak, when I very often woke with a sudden start and began calling out immediately in some excitable language which was unintelligible to everybody.

I have attributed to this habit of mine in childhood the dreams which repeated themselves with a fair degree of constancy throughout my early manhood—dreams hardly to be called dreams, but rather visions of light. Again and again as a boy and as a young man I was conscious in sleep of the most marvellous and shining brightness. I seemed to be standing in the midst of a universe of warm, dazzling, and primrose glory—a glory which was without form and without inhabitants, a glory which vibrated but did not blind, which was so beautiful and entrancing that it was a veritable ecstasy to lose one's sense of identity in its suffusing joy. Nothing ever happened in these visions. I was either simply aware of the transcendent light or felt myself sinking into its fathomless beauty.

I used to think that the lights of sunsets into which I gazed as a child had impressed themselves upon my unthinking brain, and that these beautiful impressions recurred in sleep with all the rapture of a drowning consciousness. Even now this may

be a partial explanation of the visions which came to me at the end of 1912, but, I am persuaded, only a partial explanation.

On the night of which I have been writing I saw for the first time for many years the vision of my youth. But there was a difference. The light was more burning and sublime. Forms, dimly discernible, floated in the midst of it. And as I gazed into the infinite depths of this fathomless but tenanted glory, slowly and very distinctly I saw the words appear high above me and at enormous distance, NEXT YEAR.

I had no notion what they signified. I simply saw them. I perceived without wonder or interest that spirit-forms were swimming in constant movement through this golden ether; and without wonder or interest I perceived the luminous words NEXT YEAR burning in the midst of the glory.

And then, suddenly, I woke from sleep.

It was two o'clock. I switched on the light, looked about me for a moment, and then turned on my side, and slept again. I dreamed precisely the same dream, and woke at 2.50. I saw that I had left the light burning, and turned it off, and slept immediately. At 3.25 I woke from the same dream.

So great was the impression made upon me by these three visions that I noted the occurrence in my book of engagements. I woke conscious that a strange and significant thing had happened to me. I felt sure that the dream had a meaning, an interpretation. I was not elated ; on the contrary, I was depressed. I did not anticipate blessing ; I expected calamity. My impression was that next year something would befall England of a dreadful and overwhelming character ; I felt that in some strange and quite inexplicable manner I had been warned of national disaster ; nothing could dislodge from my mind the sensation of a mysterious communication and the conviction of certain calamity ahead.

For this reason I made the entry mentioned above in my book of engagements—I kept no diary—and under the note of my three visions I wrote, “Navy : *Coup d'état* ”—to remind me of the dinner-party.

An hour later, as I sat at breakfast, the face of the starving child looking over its mother's shoulder suddenly and most vividly recurred to my mind. I sat back in my chair, dazed and startled. Until that moment I had forgotten the incident. My vision had drawn it out of my thoughts. An overwhelming impulse now visited my mind. I

got up from the table, finished my dressing, and rang for a cab. Before ten o'clock I was in the police-station and had spoken to the mother as well as to the inspector of the police and to the court missionary.

CHAPTER III

GODSMARK

MY appeal to the magistrate was of some avail. The sentence, he said, would have been severer but for my disinterested account of the provocation. However, the man had committed a serious assault and had resisted the police. He must go to prison.

I feel quite certain that some power was acting through me and by me that morning. I went to the police-station on an irresistible impulse ; I spoke from the witness-box of the police-court with an energy and an earnestness which were foreign to my nature. I was not in the smallest degree self-conscious or distressed ; I felt throughout the whole proceedings and during the rest of the morning a sensation of what I may call subdued exaltation. I was calm, but I was happy. I was earnest, but I was peaceful. The sentence on the poor man did not distress me. I was satisfied. It seemed to me that everything was happening because it had to

happen, and in precisely that manner. I was never for one moment distressed, disappointed, or nervous.

When the proceedings were over, I arranged with the court missionary to make myself responsible for the mother and children. I took them straight from the police-court to my friend Dr. — in Grosvenor Street. He was most kind and earnest about the infant, and made no remark at all concerning so strange an invasion of his consulting-room. He told me that I must get a trained nurse immediately, and that the best thing I could do for the family was to move them at once into the country.

That afternoon I was going into Dorsetshire for the week-end to stay with my cousin Arthur Rempstone. I telegraphed, asking him if he could provide a furnished cottage for some poor people I wanted to bring down with me. His reply did not reach me before I started, but I carried the family with me, an excellent nurse in charge of the baby.

Arthur Rempstone met me at the station. He told me that he had arranged with an old quarryman on his estate to house and board the family. A carriage was waiting for them, and we saw them off before entering the motor-car. And not until that moment did Rempstone exclaim at my action. He chaffed me good-naturedly for a few minutes,

rallying me on the new character I had so suddenly assumed, and asking for explanations ; but on hearing my story, which I told him only in brief, he expressed the very greatest sympathy for the old soldier in prison, and said that he was really only too pleased to be of service in such a matter. He was quite charming and kind and understanding.

The house-party was political. After dinner we sat up till one o'clock discussing the crisis. There was no abuse of the Radicals, no vehemence of any kind, but the company was convinced of crisis and anticipated a downfall of British power ; they appeared to me resigned to a ruin of everything, a complete and total ruin which they felt to be inescapable and inavertible. It was the gloomy and sorrowful discussion of thoughtful men conscious of doom. Every suggestion of action was rejected rather than criticised. And every attempt at cheerfulness was stillborn.

On the following morning Arthur Rempstone took me after breakfast to see my beggars, as he called the family I had adopted. As we walked through the park and climbed the path to the downs, he spoke to me of the old man with whom my beggars were lodged.

"He is," said Rempstone, "one of the characters about these parts. His very name is extraordinary,

for it is Godsmark—evidently a creation of the Puritans. They call him hereabouts the Hermit. Nobody ever speaks of him by his name. It is always ‘the Hermit’—‘I saw the Hermit about it,’ or ‘Up by the Hermit’s cottage.’ He is a man of sixty, a widower, and all his children are married and gone. He lives entirely by himself. But—don’t be anxious ; his cottage is not the pigsty you might imagine. The old fellow is wonderfully clean and particular. He regards housework as well as every other thing in life as a part of religion. He said to me once, ‘When I wash, master, I think of my black sins and long for heart-cleanness ; when I bake bread I think of the soul I’m making for God’s judgment ; and when I clean and tidy up a bit, I think of the little faults in my character which want the winnowing-fan of the Son of Man.’ He used to preach at one time, and was rather noisy over it ; but he’s quiet now—altogether subdued and gentle. I don’t often see him, but when I do he interests me a great deal. He works his quarry almost entirely by himself, and sees scarcely anybody except the carters who come to fetch away his stone. He keeps a few fowls and a donkey and a couple of goats. He told me once that he had learnt more from birds and animals than from men and women ; and he added, ‘Ever notice, master, how the Son of Man

took notice of them things ? ' Altogether, he is a nice, good old fellow, and you may be quite sure your beggars will be happy with him if they don't mind solitude."

The cottage stood in a hollow of the hills, with a well-kept garden surrounding it, and with the quarry just out of sight over the brow of the hill. The rooms were simply furnished, but adequately and neatly. The place was clean. The nurse, who was a lady, expressed herself very well pleased with the arrangements, and spoke even enthusiastically of the scenery and the air. She seemed to enter into the idea of this existence with the spirit of a girl embarking for the first time on the experience of camping out.

Godsmark was a picturesque figure. His head seemed to me one of the finest-shaped I had ever cast eyes upon—so solid, so dignified, so dense in the bone, with the grey hair thick and stubborn, like a mane. His infinitely wrinkled skin was burned by sun and wind ; the blue eyes, socketed in large sweeping curves of bone, were grave and intelligent and gentle ; the nose was big and shapely, with a firm arch ; the lower part of his face was covered with moustache and beard. He was a man two inches short of six feet, heavily built, with huge rounded shoulders and clumsy slow-moving limbs.

His voice was deep and sonorous. He spoke very quietly and without haste.

We followed him up the rough path at the back of his garden to the quarry just above the hollow. The place was strewn with broken stones. The road descending over the downs was cut into deep ruts by the carts. The entrance to the quarry was like a cave, with brambles and grasses and ferns and wild flowers hanging over the yellow rock under which it descended into dampness and dark. On the high ground just above this entrance was the shed where he shaped the stone that he quarried—an open shed built and roofed entirely of stone, with no mortar of any kind. The floor was thick with white dust, and all the tools and implements of the old fellow's craft were almost white with this fine powder. There was a text on the wall.

The view from this eminence was wide and exhilarating. The rough gorse-covered, wind-swept moors of the quarry-land, with a few clumps of fir trees and broken jungles of thorn rising out of thick bracken, sloped slowly and unevenly to the habitations of men in the valley. And far across the kempt and umbrageous valley, far beyond the grey cottages and grey farm-houses and grey church and grey road winding through orchards and gardens to the sea, rose the majestic downs of Dorset on

the other side, green and smooth to their summits, soft and beautiful in the morning air, calm and consolatory in their everlasting strength.

As we stood there Arthur Rempstone said to the quarryman, " Well, what do you think up here of the political hubbub ?—What do you think of all the excitement over in London ? "

The old man turned his face and looked at me. For a moment we surveyed each other in silence, establishing—so it appeared to me—an understanding of soul which no language could have brought about. The old man seemed not to look into my eyes, but into my soul ; and, for my part, I seemed to see some extraordinary beauty and some very intimate reality behind the eyes and within the mind of the patriarch.

" I think, master," he said, looking slowly away and resting his eyes on the opposite hills, " that something's coming along by and by that will alter pretty near everything that now is. But I don't think it will be anything that people is expecting. I think it will be something different."

Rempstone laughed. " A war, eh ? Well, I'm not sure that a war wouldn't be the best thing for England—not at all sure."

The old man looked at me again.

" You're not very keen, then," Rempstone con-

tinued, "about politics?" He began to move away, opening his cigarette-case as he went.

The quarryman, lowering his eyes, answered: "No, master, I'm no politician. I keep out of all that. And I can't understand any intelligent man being interested in such things."

Rempstone burst out laughing, and turned winking to me as he struck a match for his cigarette.

The old fellow continued: "There are all kinds of government in the world, master. There's monarchies and republics, and constitutional monarchies and despotisms—all sorts: and not one of the peoples living under them governments is any different from the others. They're all unhappy. There's poverty in France as well as in Spain. There's misery and wretchedness in the United States of America as well as in Russia. You may get rid of Kings, you may set up Parliaments, you may talk of equality and liberty and brotherhood, but it all comes back to the same thing in the end. One man poor, another rich; one man happy, another miserable; one man good, another bad—that's what you'll find under every government, and all the laws of our politicians, do what they like, won't alter things. So why should I bother about Radical and Tory? Why should I concern myself with their quarrels? I can see for myself that it means

nothing, and makes no difference to anybody at all. And, besides, I know—*I'm very sure I know*—the only thing that can do any good. If I know that, and know it I do, master, why should I bother my head about law-changing ? ”

Rempstone said to him : “ Look here, my friend, you may philosophise up here very comfortably just now, but how would you regard politics if a shell from a German cruiser knocked your quarry to smithereens and another scattered your cottage, your hens, your goats, and your potatoes to the four winds ? That is what the Radicals will bring us to, sooner or later—mark my words.”

The old man looked down on the stones at his feet. “ Master,” he said, “ what a rare blundering mess of things these here politics have made, when such things are possible—slaughter and murder and all ! How can you trust them, master, if they can't do no better for you than that ? ”

Rempstone glanced at me as if to say : “ Did you ever hear such a fellow in your life ! ” But it seemed to me that the man saw deeper into the soul of things than Rempstone. I was greatly, perhaps strangely, attracted by him. As we moved away I was on the point of asking him what new thing he expected—the thing that was to alter life and that no man was anticipating ; but with the question

on my tongue, something inward checked me. I felt that I would ask him that question when we were alone.

On our way home, Rempstone said to me: "There's some truth in what the Hermit told us. After all, France has solved none of the real problems. And is America a country at unity with itself? I wonder if all the law-changing in the world, as he calls it, makes any real difference—any real fundamental difference."

"That's Conservatism!" I said.

He burst out laughing. "So it is, by George! Yes, all the bother comes from these confounded Radicals, who want to alter everything."

I did not remind him that Godsmark had foretold the altering of everything. I began to doubt politics from that moment. I began to wonder, without any relation to politics, how everything could be changed.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTMAS DAY

BY the kindness of a friend I was able to find employment for the old soldier when he came out of prison. But this work was in a London warehouse, and the question arose whether the wife and family should continue in the country or return to the city. I was conscious of rather unworthy satisfaction in my settlement of this difficulty.

I persuaded the mother to leave her baby with the nurse in Dorsetshire, while she herself, together with the little boy, joined her husband in London. My satisfaction at this arrangement arose from a desire in my heart to isolate the child from the family, to possess it, as it were, for myself, to have the supreme power of directing its destinies. The father was a good enough fellow, but sullen, bitter, and with no very satisfactory record in the matter of drink. The mother, whatever she may have been at the beginning of her tragic married life, was of a depressing and complaining nature. The little boy

was not attractive. I confess that I desired to get rid of the family, and that I exercised some little cunning in achieving my end. I set the man up in a decent house, provided the family with a sufficient wardrobe, and possessed myself of the babe. It became the greatest possession of my life.

Every week I went down to Dorsetshire, not staying with the Rempstones, who had moved to London, but occupying a room in a seaside hotel which was not more than two miles from the quarries. I liked the nurse, I was interested in the Hermit, and—why I cannot tell—I adored the babe.

The child was six months of age, but thin, peaky, and torpid. He never smiled. He never kicked or waved his arms. He did nothing, in fact, that attracts and beguiles grown-up people in babies. Yet the nurse worshipped him. Godsmark was never so happy as when he held the little weakling in his arms, and, as I have said, I adored the child. There was something in the very listlessness of the babe that exercised a spell over one's affections. I don't think I wanted him to smile or talk. It was enough for me to observe the small, pale face, to look into the large, sorrowful eyes, to watch the shadows of tired perplexity which so often passed across his brow. The nurse, holding him to her face, so that the little head rested and pressed against

her cheek, would sometimes say with caressing tenderness, half turning to kiss him, "You'll soon be a big, strong boy, won't you, and run about, and play with the little chickens, and watch the butterflies, and shout at the goats?" And on these occasions I was conscious of no pleasurable anticipation in the prospect of the boy's health and joy. I suppose I wanted him to get well, but certainly I never wanted him to be strong, vigorous, and cheerful. Something in his utter helplessness seemed to create a mother in my heart.

My visits to the cottage on the moors never passed without long and earnest conversations with the Hermit. The nurse, who was a religious woman, spoke to me with real reverence of the old man's spiritual life. "He has taught me," she said once, "more than I ever knew before; he is like one of the old saints—his faith really is the faith of a child." In something of the same way the Hermit acted upon my mind. He did not give me faith, he cleared away none of my intellectual difficulties; but he detached me more and more from my interest in politics, he interested me more and more in religious speculations. I acknowledged in my soul that the faith of this old man, childlike or childish, was a very beautiful and dignifying possession of the mind.

I spent Christmas in Dorsetshire, and on Christmas Day I was early at the cottage with presents for my godson, as we called the babe, and for his kind friends the nurse and the Hermit. An hour after my arrival the nurse departed for church, and the Hermit took charge of the child. It was a bright, calm day, and wrapped in a thick shawl the babe was allowed to sit outside in the garden. Godsmark held the child in his arms, seated in an old-fashioned Windsor chair, his back to the house, his face towards the valley and the downs.

We began to talk.

“Near on two thousand year ago,” he said presently, nodding his head and speaking very slowly and quietly, “a babe was born to a poor woman, and laid in a manger. There were kings in they times, and governors and lawmakers, and priests, and councils, just as there be now. Aye, there wasn’t much difference between then and now as regards the laws and their makers. I reckon we have as many problems now as them people had near on two thousand year ago. From all I hear and from all I see, our problems are, maybe, a bit worse than what they had to deal with. And while all the kings of the earth, and the governors and princes, and rulers and lords, and councils and peoples were busy with their laws and their taxes,

that little babe lay in the manger—the least of all created things, the weakest and most helpless of all things living. And his mother's tears fell on his face. And his father pitied him for lying there in the wooden trough. And I suppose there was singing and laughter in the tavern near by."

He turned his face towards me. "Sir," he said, "when I think what that babe did—without changing one law and without drawing a sword—it makes light in my soul. It makes everything clear and bright. I look at this little babe, helpless and feeble in my arms, and I say to myself, 'Perhaps you know more and can do more for the whole world than all the Kings and Parliaments.' I'm always ready to bow myself before a child. They're so near to God for one thing. And maybe they are here to reveal Him. For, a little child shall lead them. That's a true saying. The great men pile up a lot of confusion, and raise all the dust of trouble, but it's the little child that gives peace to the heart and rest to the soul. Whether this little one here lives or dies, he may even now be changing the world. I'm better for him, the lady nurse is better for him, and perhaps you too are better for him."

"Well," I replied, "I am certainly better for having met you, and I met you through the child." And then, after a few moments, I spoke of the

political anxieties, and asked him at last the question which had always been in my mind—namely, what event he anticipated which was to alter everything, and which few expected.

He replied : “ I look for a Visitation, something from outside the world, nothing at all from inside the world. I don’t know what it may be. I can’t tell. I don’t attempt to guess at it. But I think something strange and quiet will happen to us before very long, and that it will be a blessing.”

After some moments of silence, in which he studied the child’s face attentively, he said to me : “ It’s true, isn’t it, for so a gentleman once told me thirty years back and more, that all down the history of the world, whensomever things were on the point of breaking up in desolation, God has always raised up some man to save the human race ? There’s nearly always been someone, so the gentleman told me, even far back in pagan days, who came just at the nick of time to save the world from ruin.” He looked up at me. “ Well, I think it’s time for someone to come now. And I’ll tell you why I think it’s time. The Son of Man said, A house that is divided against itself cannot stand. If He said that, it’s true. And if it’s true of any country it’s true of our’n. There’s hatred abroad. There’s violence. There’s anger and bitter speaking.

England's bound to go to pieces unless some man is raised up by God to save us, for—never mind whether these new laws be good ones or bad ones—England's a house divided against itself. There's no brotherhood. There's no love. People are envious of each other. Rich and poor, master and servants, high and low—they're all at strife, all enemies. And why? Because the nation has no faith in God. The faith of the nation is Mammon. England, and it's the same with most other countries by all I hear, is not so much trying to serve God and Mammon as deliberately and blasphemously serving Mammon alone. What can come of that? Life here is the step to life hereafter. We're here for God's purpose. And everyone is talking of wages! I hear what the carters say. I hear what the people in the village say. And I see the rich people who come here for their holidays. Seems to me they're mad—mad. I think the world has clean turned its back on God. I think men have forgotten eternity altogether."

While he was speaking I watched the child. The eyes of apathy were directed, but without interest of any kind at the garden soil in front of it. The hands were listlessly held together and lay wearily against the breast. The body was quite still. It was difficult to see the breathing of the little form.

As if he knew my thoughts, the quarryman, looking down at the child on his breast, said to me : “ We cannot say whether this little one will live or no. There’s the look of the other world in his eyes. He seems only here for a moment. I somehow think he won’t stay with us for long—this world doesn’t seem like the right place for him. God’s will be done. But I’d love him to live—love him to live and lead the world back to faith.”

He raised his head and looked towards the hills. “ Have you ever thought, sir,” he asked, with great seriousness, “ what would have happened to the world if the babe born near on two thousand years ago had died in the manger ? Can you think of it ? Can you picture it ? Suppose the Son of Man had died a baby ! Nothing would be the same. Nothing.”

My thoughts were with the child on his breast. I was horribly afraid it would die. Rather impatiently I made answer to the quarryman, leaning forward, I remember, to touch and stroke the tiny hands of the child with my finger. “ We must remember that morality existed before Christ. Men were conscious of God before He came.”

I was startled by the tone of the old man’s voice as he replied : “ What ! is it so dim and unreal to you as that ? Don’t *you* feel the difference between

Him and all others? Why, sir, think a moment, think a moment. What would it be if the words had never been uttered on earth—‘Come unto Me,’ ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life,’ and ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you’? Suppose the story of the Prodigal Son had never been told—‘And *while he was yet a great way off*, his father saw him, *and ran—ran*, mark you—and fell on his neck and kissed him.’ What a difference if that story had never been told! How should we know that God is love? Who has told us so? What proof is there for it? A God of Love—why, that’s everything. Nothing else matters. And but for the Son of Man we should never have known it as the truth of life. Morality—aye, there was morality before He came; but it wasn’t His morality, it wasn’t the same morality as saves us now from destruction—the morality of forgetting self, of doing kindness to others, of hunger and thirst after His righteousness. And where is the certain hope of heaven without the Son of Man?”

I tried to turn him from his argument. “Of course, the teaching of Christ has been a profound influence,” I said placatingly; and then added: “Tell me about this child; do you feel that it will not live, do you think it will not even live a year or two?”

He replied : " I've known delicate children to grow up and live a great while : I've seen some the doctor despaired of grow into strength and years ; but I've never yet seen a babe with the look in its eyes that our little one has reach manhood or womanhood. It's a look never to be mistaken. I've seen it in the eyes of children twelve, thirteen, fourteen—merry children that ran and played and were happier than many another ; but I've never seen one of they children man or woman."

" Do you think this child may live to be twelve or thirteen ? " I asked.

He looked down at the babe, leaning back his head a moment to study it, then, bowing his face, he kissed the child's cheek, and said without looking at me, " He'll go soon."

I expected some such answer, but it clouded my mind with depression. I leaned forward again and stroked the tiny hands.

I spoke to the child, my face close to his, and he looked at me with the same unlifting shadow of sorrow in his eyes. It seemed to me that I saw the expression of which the quarryman had spoken. A sense of tears flowed into my mind.

" We shall understand many things one day," said the Hermit. " And perhaps we shall know then why little ones are born only for a glance at this

troubled world. Be sure, there's a reason for it." Then he said to me : " Sir, it isn't until a man feels in his heart, understands with his mind, and knows in his soul that the Son of Man was the very Son of the great God, it isn't until then that he can look on everything in the world with quiet eyes."

When I returned to London I was oppressed by the feeling of doom overhanging this child. I went to Dr. — in Grosvenor Street and consulted him. He assured me that the nurse was entirely competent, but recommended a doctor in Swanage, who was, he told me, as able a man as could be found in England. " Let him see the child," he concluded ; " and if he thinks it any good I will run down with you one week-end and have a talk with him."

The Swanage doctor's report was grave but not alarming. The child was receiving, he told me, the best possible treatment, the utmost care and attention. The weakness and apathy were due to marasmus, probably caused by starvation or semi-starvation both before and immediately after birth.

The Greek word *μαρασμός* told me what this disease meant. It meant a wasting, a withering away. I recalled Milton's lines in *Paradise Lost*.

Pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence. . . .

But I looked up the word in a dictionary. I saw that the pathological definition was, "A wasting of the flesh." A note added, "The term is usually restricted to cases in which the cause of the wasting is obscure." I felt convinced that the child would die.

My mind was ridden by this gloomy conviction to the exclusion of almost every other thought until the end of the year. On the night of the 31st of December the vision of supernatural light came to me in my sleep, and once again the words NEXT YEAR burned with colossal splendour in the midst of dim circling spirits, whose forms were merged in the golden ether.

I woke to the New Year with a feeling of relief. I felt that something would now happen. I even welcomed the idea of some tremendous catastrophe that would shake the whole world, as a housewife shakes a dirty doormat filled with dust. I was conscious of excitement and energy. I distinctly anticipated an event of some unprecedented magnitude. I think I wanted the world to be turned topsy-turvy.

Nothing happened on New Year's Day. My feeling of elation, however, continued. I received a letter

from the nurse on the following morning and read it without anxiety. My rather morbid desire to visit the child had quite gone. In sending money to the nurse I found myself writing cheerfully and lightly. I went to the club, I paid visits, I discussed the political situation, I read the newspapers. It was diverting to pick up the disordered threads of my former life, not to work at them again, but to see how seriously men were running to and fro under the invisible and descending sword of Damocles.

Lord Colwall said to me at St. James's Club on Saturday the 4th of January, "There's a movement afoot among the Socialists just now which is going to play Old Harry with the country before the month is out."

I remember smiling as I said to him, "My dear fellow, won't you welcome it?"

He said: "I'm perfectly serious. It's a much bigger thing than you imagine. They mean business this time. We're in for a real shindy. Wait a few weeks and see."

I answered: "But don't you feel that it is bound to happen, whatever it is? And don't you also feel that anything in the world will be better than the present condition of things?"

"Yes," he said, "if I could be certain of the Army.

A fight would perhaps be the best thing in the world for us. But I'm not sure of the Army. I believe the country is rotten—yes, rotten from head to foot, *rotten !*”

And he stalked away, angry and contemptuous.

CHAPTER V

THOU ART NOT THE MAN

ON the next day, Sunday, January 5th, I received a visit at my rooms from the political journalist who had mooted to me at a dinner-party in October the idea of a *coup d'état*.

He was pale, worn, and disordered-looking. His long hair, through which he now and then passed his lean fingers, hung in dishevelled lankness over his ears. His lips twitched. His eyes were feverishly bright. There was a dim patch of colour in his grey cheeks. In spite of all these obvious signs of a mind clearly excited to a very dangerous degree, the voice of the man was low and quiet—completely in control. Moreover, he did not walk about the room or gesticulate as he spoke. He sat calmly all the time he was speaking, and save for the occasional movement of his hands through his hair, he was motionless.

“I’ve come to tell you,” he said, “that the end is now in sight—literally the end. The end of life

as we know it now, the end of the British Empire as our forefathers knew it. All that wonderful glory which democracy has never been able to appreciate, any more than it can appreciate Shakespeare's sonnets, Shelley's lyrics, and Chopin's music, will perish and pass away. It will be as if it had never been. Within two or three months—it may be only a few weeks—the Empire will fall. Literally, the Empire will fall. And one knows what that means. It means universal war. It means starvation from one end of England to the other. It means that hell will be let loose."

"I am not in the least unsympathetic," I replied, "but I would ask you to admit that Shakespeare's sonnets, Shelley's lyrics, and Chopin's music are not particularly appreciated by other classes in the community. And I really doubt whether the moneyed classes and the lower middle-classes of the country are any more imaginative as regards patriotism than the Socialists."

"The rich," he said bitterly, "are mostly pigs. History will censure them, and patriots will curse them. But at least they are not plotting the downfall of the Empire. God knows I loathe the breed as energetically as any Socialist. They are responsible for much. They are ignorant, selfish, stupid, and futile. But they represent something

for which we must fight to the death. They represent individualism. They represent private liberty. They stand for the social order."

"But tell me," I said, "what is the plot of which you have heard?"

"I have not merely heard it," he answered; "I know it. What I am now going to tell you is truth, is fact. You will believe me when I tell you that I have had spies at work in the opposite camp for six months. One of my men, indeed, is almost a leader of the Socialists. Only three other men in England know this. I can trust you to say nothing about it for the present. In a month or two it won't matter what anybody says. Most of us will have had our throats cut before that!"

"Well?"

"I can see you are incredulous," he said, rather bitterly. "I don't blame you. It seems impossible that the Empire should fall. We have cried 'Wolf' too often. We have used the big words too frequently. No one really believes in revolution. No one can imagine a state of universal rapine. No one thinks that Armageddon will ever come. But how many great Empires have fallen in the past? How many nations have ceased to exist? People talk of ruin and revolution; they pretend even to

expect them ; but they don't know what they mean. They haven't enough imagination to conceive of actual cataclysm."

" Well ? " I repeated.

" Do you believe in them—in ruin and revolution ? " he demanded.

" I can see that they are possible."

" Yes, but do you perceive that they are inevitable ? "

" No, I don't perceive that."

" Why not ? "

" I think something will happen."

" That we shall muddle through again ? "

" Perhaps."

" You have nothing to suggest—no policy, no course of action ? "

" I am waiting for the General Election."

" It will never come."

" What will prevent it ? " I asked.

" The end of things."

" Well, you had better tell me what you know."

" But for what purpose ? "

" Why have you come ? "

" Shall I tell you ? We think that you are a man trusted by the country, trusted by both parties, respected by the newspapers. You have never

been a party man. You have no great personal interests to defend. You have never cried 'Wolf.' We think that the country will believe you. We want you to take the field. We want you to sound the alarm."

"You exaggerate my authority."

"A man with greater authority would be worse than useless."

"Mediocrities cannot stop revolutions."

"England believes in mediocrities. A safe man is the best pilot for a storm. Besides, we only ask you to sound the alarm. We want you, to begin with, to write a letter to *The Times*. Then we want you to summon a meeting of Conservatives and Liberals and even Radicals who are opposed to Socialism. We want you as chairman of the meetings that will follow. A leader will be found. You can then retire, if you wish, to your friends. But you are the man for the present moment. You bear an honoured, even a glorious name. You have never figured on political platforms. Your interests are neither territorial nor capitalistic. And your writings have given you a universal reputation for justice and common sense. You have only to sound the alarm to awaken the nation—to awaken, that is, the brains of the nation. There is yet hope of a Coalition—a Coalition that will not be

afraid to act. You are the man to call it into being."

I asked him to make his disclosure, saying that of course I would act if I deemed the situation sufficiently serious. I must confess that I felt flattered by his opinion of my serviceableness. The most modest and nervous men are perhaps more dangerously susceptible to flattery than the bold and self-satisfied. I liked to think of myself as "the safe man," the man trusted by both parties, the pilot of my country.

"To begin with," he said, "the loyalty of the Labour Party to the Liberals, the satisfaction they express for the Land Bill, and all their professions of a desire to reach their ends through legislative action, are a blind. They mask a plot. They obscure a conspiracy. The Labour Party helped to pass the Insurance Bill, of which they disapprove heartily and contemptuously. They helped with Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment, for which they feel not the smallest interest. Every now and then they have threatened the Liberal Party—so that people might think their work in the Commons was sincere. And all the time they have been preparing their blow—the blow that is to smash everything."

"What is this blow?"

“ A general strike.”

“ Well, they have threatened that before.”

“ The threat was a blind. While they pretended to threaten, they were quietly preparing the machinery. They have been preparing it for over a year. There is to be no hitch. No blunder of any kind. On May the First there will be a universal stoppage of work. Not a train will run, not a ship will be unloaded, not a van will leave the stables, not a mine will be descended, not a factory will be worked. Throughout the country, from north to south, from east to west, there will be paralysis of the national life. The thing has been devilishly planned. There is to be no violence, and no speeches, and no demonstrations. Without warning of any kind the workers are simply going to stop working. Government may order troops to unload ships and to run trains ; and the workers will neither protest nor take any steps to prevent it. There is to be no picketing, no appeals. The strike is to be so general and so sudden and so total that it will be above the need of force. In a week the Government will be obliged to surrender.”

“ You mean that the Unions are accumulating funds ?—that the whole community of workers will be able to hold out indefinitely ? ”

“ No. Funds have been accumulated, and may

be used before the strike. But the master minds hold that there will be no need of funds while the strike lasts. The workers will be secretly warned a week in advance to lay in stores. The Unions, I understand, will buy up a good deal of coal, and establish depots for provisions. There is to be no starvation. The suddenness and completeness of the stoppage is to assure victory, and victory within a few weeks. The longest time anticipated for governmental defiance is three weeks."

"And the end of it all?"

"The Socialists will declare a republic. They begin with a repudiation of national debt and declare the nation to be the owner of all forms of wealth. A committee of twelve is to publish a Code. No Parliament will be summoned for a year. Rent is to be the only tax. The Navy is to be cut down, the regular Army abolished, and the British Empire is to become an International Trust."

"What on earth does that mean?"

"Our Socialists have already arrived at some sort of tentative agreement with the leading Socialists of Germany, Italy, and France. The general strike may or may not be international. But the effect of a general strike in England and the declaration of an English Republic with the British Empire as a free-trade International Trust are supposed

to be amply sufficient for a settlement of foreign difficulties."

"You are quite sure of all this?"

"Perfectly."

"Have you seen any documents?"

"None exist."

"You depend on your spies?"

"Yes, and one's own observation."

"The spies agree in their accounts?"

"There is absolute unanimity."

"Well, what can we do?"

"First we must rouse the nation by unmasking the conspiracy."

"But if it is denied?"

"We must unmask it in such a way that no man can doubt its truth. Our only hope is to alarm sensible men on both sides of politics. I don't even despair of some of the best Labour men. But we must make the thing real. We must make the nation see that it is threatened with immediate total, irretrievable ruin. That is why we want you. You are the man to sound the alarm."

I thought for a moment, and then I said, "But suppose I do alarm the nation. What can we do? You say the workers will cease working on May Day. Will they change their plans because the middle-classes are alarmed?"

“No, perhaps not. But the Government will be encouraged to take action.”

“What action can they take?”

“They can break up the Unions. They can blockade the ports. They can employ the whole Army for trade purposes. Action of this kind will tend to frighten the entire nation, to convince it of the reality of the peril. The better men among the working-classes will be encouraged to throw off the tyranny of the Unions. Socialism will be revealed as a despotism. We shall smash the conspiracy. Remember, we have only two real difficulties in our path. First, the general apathy of the nation, its utter lack of imagination which leaves it powerless to realise what revolution means. Second, the ignorance of the working-classes as to the reality of Socialism. It needs an earthquake to startle the nation out of its stupor.”

“And I am to be the earthquake!”

“You see how serious it is?”

“Yes, oh yes. But I really——”

“Do you believe what I have told you?”

“I am not convinced.”

“What will convince you? Will you see the spies for yourself?”

“May I consider that?”

“It is time for action.”

"Well, a day or two."

"Give me your answer to-morrow."

"The day after."

"Evidently you don't realise the gravity——"

"The greater the gravity, the greater the necessity for consideration."

"Will you let me bring one of the spies to-night?"

"I should prefer to think in quiet."

He rose from his seat. "In God's Name," he said, "assure yourself that what I have told you is the truth. There is an actual conspiracy to seize the government of this country. It is no nightmare. No dream. No delusion. It is fact. And the conspiracy has been at work for over a year. Do believe that. I implore you to believe it. I implore you to believe it with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul."

"Have you spoken," I asked, "to the Editor of *The Times*?"

He shook his head. "Not yet," he said abruptly.

"To any member of the ministry?"

"No."

"And your idea of a Naval *coup d'état*?"

His eyes blinked. "We have done nothing very much in that direction."

“ But something ? ”

“ Well, certain Naval officers have been sounded.”

“ Not very hopefully ? ”

“ Not very hopefully.”

“ Well, till the day after to-morrow,” I said, getting up from my chair.

He took my hand sorrowfully and dejectedly, as if I had disappointed him. “ You can imagine, can’t you,” he asked, “ what this thing will mean ? You can imagine what Socialism means for England, and what it means for Europe, and what it means for Asia ? You don’t think of the thing as impossible and fantastic ? You are a man of letters, your imagination has not been destroyed by machinery and trade—you can imagine what it would mean ? ”

“ You need not have any misgiving on that head.”

“ But think—think of the forty million block-heads in this country who can’t imagine it ? That’s our peril. That’s the rock on which the Empire will break itself to powder. The stupidity of the British people ! The death of the imaginative faculty ! My God, what a peril it is ! ”

“ We have time to do something,” I said soothingly.

“ Oh, God, God, send us a man ! ” he cried

bitterly, turning away. "Send us a Cæsar, a Cromwell, a Napoleon ! Send us a man who dares to act ! " And as he went out I knew that in his soul he had already said of me, "Thou art not the man."

CHAPTER VI

THE PILOT

I CONSENTED to act.

He was paler, quieter, more depressed and worn in appearance. When I told him my decision he smiled and nodded his head with satisfaction, but not with enthusiasm. I could read his feelings. He had made a convert. He had not found a leader.

I handed him a draft of the letter I had drawn up for *The Times*. He took it in his hand, went to a chair by the window, and with one knee resting on the cushion, a finger at his lips, his eyes frowning with disapproval, read the letter through.

At the conclusion he raised his head, removed his knee from the chair, and laughing bitterly exclaimed, "Excellent, excellent—for a diocesan festival!" He handed me the paper. "My dear sir," he said, with acerbity, "I am sorry to have troubled you." Then he laughed again. "And yet that letter ought to be preserved. Some

historian ought to see it. I think it should be headed 'The Pleasurable Anticipations of a Gentleman of Leisure concerning the Small and Insignificant Matter of the Downfall of the British Empire.' If I thought that the Museum would be existing a year hence I would ask you to give me that letter."

"I was afraid it would not be volcanic enough for your tastes."

"No ; it's rather a small squib, isn't it ? "

"But you have used violence for a good many years without very much effect."

"Oh, no doubt. But do you really think that letter could check a revolution ? "

"That was not its purpose."

"What, then ? "

"To set men thinking."

"The few men who can think have thought already. What we want is a call to action. Would that letter induce anyone to lift a little finger ? "

"Well, it is all I can do."

"Don't send it, I beg you."

"Why not ? "

"It would only do harm. It would only deepen the illusion that the whole thing is a cry of 'Wolf.' "

"Very well, I won't send it."

He smiled and gave me his hand. "Forgive my disappointment," he said.

"What are you going to do?" I inquired.

"Send my wife and children out of the country."

"And yourself?"

"Oh, I shall continue to cry 'Wolf.'"

"Won't you try somebody else?" I mentioned a few names.

"Yes, I shall probably try somebody else," he answered, and smiling once again took his departure.

I watched the papers for some days, but saw nothing in the nature of a manifesto. It was evident, however, that something was suspected. Letters of a rather violent kind, and leading articles of a warning character, began to appear with a significant regularity. The Land Bill was fiercely denounced in advance. Capitalists announced that they were moving their industries abroad. Noblemen threatened to sell everything, to dismiss everybody, and to leave the country. Spinsters and widows wrote pathetic remonstrances. It was asserted again and again that the Liberal Party had sold itself to the Socialists.

What made me sceptical and preserved in me that curious sensation of lightness and elation which had come with the New Year was the aspect of the London streets. Everything wore the

appearance of stability, and a stability so enormous and pervasive that it could not be overturned. I walked about the same streets that I had known all my life. Luxury and happiness still smiled upon the town in the midst of an incessant movement of business which was cheerful and good-hearted. The strange juxtaposition of virtue and vice, profligacy and poverty, greatness and littleness, beauty and ugliness which had always seemed to me of the very essence of London, still confronted me at every turn. I was conscious of no difference. No sense of revolution charged the air. No shadow of change fell upon the city. I saw the same disciplined vigour in the faces of policemen, the same hearty good-nature in the faces of workmen, the same extraordinary beauty in the faces of young girls, the same rather rigid expression of aloofness in the faces of clubland, and everywhere I felt the same rush of hurrying eagerness and excited contentment which has always characterised the pace of London life.

Nevertheless, I anticipated change. I expected something to happen. But no one in the world could have convinced me to believe that my friend the political journalist, with his shriek of a falling British Empire, was anywhere near the truth. I began to think of him as a madman. I remembered

similar madmen I had met among the journalists of France. In a few days I had ceased to think about him.

But I must let the reader know that I saw no reason whatever to doubt the foundation of his hysterical secret. I thought it was possible and even probable that the extreme Socialists were plotting underground for a general strike. I saw no reason to reject the idea that this general strike might be international. But the prospect of any such calamity did not in the least overwhelm me. I cannot explain how it was. All I can say is that never before in my life had I been so powerfully sustained in optimism, so conscious of equanimity, so assured that nothing serious would befall either my country or human existence.

In this state of mind I continued until the 19th of April. In a desultory way I worked for an ultimate coalition between advanced Conservatives and responsible Liberals. I visited politicians of both camps. I wrote a series of articles for the *Morning Post*. I conducted some rather important negotiations with the wealthy proprietors of Liberal newspapers. And I endeavoured, but without any success, to effect a political understanding between the Anglican and Nonconformist Churches.

All this, I must confess, was done rather in the

spirit of an amateur than a serious politician. It amused me to pull important strings in secret. Further, I was flattered to think of myself as the Richelieu of Hertford Street. The political journalist in calling me the Pilot had sapped the foundations of my moral nature. I became conceited.

CHAPTER VII

THE WIND THAT BLEW FROM THE LITTLE CLOUD

ON the 19th of April I received a letter from the nurse in Dorsetshire telling me that the child was seriously ill.

I went down by an afternoon train, and arrived at the cottage soon after seven o'clock. The Hermit was sitting by the fire reading his Bible, an oil-lamp burning on the table at his side. The nurse lighted a candle and conducted me to her bedroom. A fire was burning in the little grate. On a table which separated the nurse's bed from the child's cot a nightlight was burning in a saucer. A basin, a baby's bottle, a medicine glass, and a steriliser stood upon this table. Over the nurse's bed was a text. Just above the child's cot was a coloured picture of the Good Shepherd bearing a lamb in His arms.

The child was not sleeping. He lay on his side,

the eyes fixed upon the lining of his cot. The hands were folded together under his chin.

I saw how greatly he was changed, but for some unaccountable reason I was not shocked. I was able to study him without a sense of tears. My compassion for the shrunken, withered, and emaciated little body was deep and very tender, but it was entirely without anxiety.

I spoke to him, putting my hand to his cheek, and without changing his position he rolled his eyes round and for a moment looked at me with perplexity and surprise. The nurse asked me if I would like to take him out of bed. She wrapped him in his blanket and lifted him out of the cot. When she gave him into my arms his little head fell against my shoulder. I was really startled to feel the lightness of his body.

I carried him to the fire and sat down in a low wicker-work chair. The nurse held the candle so that I could see the child. He lay on my left arm, limp and motionless, his eyes set upon my face with exactly the same expression of stupor as I had first seen there in Trafalgar Square. I spoke to him, but it made no difference. Once, for a brief moment, his brows contracted, a look of attention came into his eyes, and he seemed to see something in my face, or something behind me, which awoke his

curiosity. But the look passed quickly away, and with the old dreadful apathy he regarded me for the rest of the time he was in my arms.

The nurse told me that one could not now hope to rear him. The doctor had instructed her to inform me of this opinion. She said he might live a few days.

I remained in the country till the end came. We sent for the father and mother on Monday. The mother came alone and spent most of her time in telling me of the difficulty they had of making two ends meet in London. She looked poor, mean, and sordid. Her stupid face and whining voice troubled my patience.

On Tuesday, the 22nd of April, the child sank into unconsciousness. I waited in the cottage till dark. Godsmark walked with me across the moors. He spoke of the child's destiny in other worlds.

"I've heard tell," he said, "of some saint who explained about heaven. He declared that babes when they die go as babes into God's Paradise. They remain as babes, and good women up there who had no children on earth, but spent their days in mothering the children of other folk, are set over these babes in heaven to nurse and to rear them into angels. I dare say that's true. I can't think

of heaven without children and without mothers. Some angel woman, I shouldn't wonder, is now standing in my cottage waiting to carry the little one on her breast into the nursery of Paradise."

I went to bed at ten o'clock and woke before five. Something induced me to rise at once and go to the cottage. I arrived a few minutes after six. The morning was bright and gracious, with an exquisite savour of spring in the cold freshness of its breath. The plants in Godsmark's garden were sparkling with dew. The blue sky was billowed with snow-coloured clouds. A lark was singing high above the quarry.

The old man met me at the door.

"The little one's gone," he said. "An hour back. He smiled for the first time in his life. He half-lifted his little arms. His eyes seemed to stand out of his head. And then he sighed like a tired man—heavily, wearily. We watched him sink into his pillow. He just twitched for a moment. The eyes closed of themselves. The lips parted. And he was gone. The clock struck five as I came down the stairs."

"Where is his mother?"

"She's sleeping now. It was awful to hear her wail. You might have thought that she had loved our little one."

“And the nurse?”

“You can go up. She’s been dressed a couple of hours.”

The child, for the first time since I had seen him, looked beautiful. I think I have never seen a face so refined and ethereal. He was smiling. An expression of quite exquisite peace characterised the tiny face. There appeared to me to be colour in the cheeks.

Something drove me from the cottage. I felt that I could not bear to meet the beautiful child’s dreadful mother. I asked the nurse to come and see me outside the cottage. I gave her money, left all the arrangements for the funeral in her hands, and asked her to come and see me in London at the end of the week.

The clinking sound of the Hermit’s chisel came to me from the brow of the hill. The lark was still singing above the cottage. From a throne of clouds in the east the sun was shining over the whole wide undulating sweep of moorland.

I made my way to the cliffs.

As I stood on the brow of the moor, just where it descends sharply to the limestone rocks—a height, I suppose, of some three hundred feet above sea-level—I observed on the horizon a little puff of cloud no bigger than a man’s hand. For some

reason this solitary cloud enchained my attention. But while I looked at it, and marked it rising like a bird above the widespread and level beauty of the sea, my thoughts were with the child's soul. I remember that I prayed. I prayed that the child might be happy. And I prayed that I might be better for the child's influence on my life. I was conscious of a yearning after innocence and holiness.

Now I do not know whether the thing that followed was natural or supernatural; I do not trouble to determine what it might be; but certainly and indisputably, as I stood on that eminence above the sea, I saw the little cloud break, dissolve, and vanish, while, instantly with its evanishment, a sound like a beautiful sigh seemed to fill the whole firmament, and a wind, warm and caressing, breathed upon me like some divine blessing.

It is impossible that imagination played any part in this experience. The wind may or may not have been supernatural, but that it breathed upon me, and that it was strangely warm and strangely soothing, there can be no manner of doubt, for it lasted a full eight or ten minutes.

I was startled at first by the warmth of this sudden wind. I came quite out of the reverie which my prayer may have induced. And with all my faculties about me I observed and reflected

upon the thing that was occurring. I distinctly felt the warmth of the wind increasing. It became at last like the heat of a greenhouse, but with no effect of stifling. I stood in this warm moving air and was aware of everything about me—the fall of the land to the rocks, the faint crepitation of the sea, the haze of the horizon, the high, long, pulsating trills of larks above the moors, and the languorous movements of cattle feeding far below me near the edge of the cliff. I was conscious of surprise that the sensation of warmth continued. I even exclaimed to myself. I turned to right and left seeking some physical explanation. And the minutes passed, eight or ten at least, before the chill came back to the morning air.

I was walking back to the hotel, still perplexed by this extraordinary experience, when a feeling of shame came to me for having run away, as it were, from the mother of the dead child. I felt guilty, and yet at the same time I felt happy—happy that I was going to her.

I said to myself as I went along, “She is a very disagreeable woman, and probably she does not feel the death of her child as I feel it, and almost certainly she will ask me for money; but is not all this just the very reason why I should go back and try to touch her heart with the peace and blessing

of God ? ” And as I said these words—most strange words for me—I was not in the least surprised at myself.

As I approached the cottage I was conscious of an accession to my heart of a most earnest and a most tender benevolence.

The mother of the child was sitting in a chair by the fire, her head bowed, her face hidden in one of her hands. She was rocking herself to and fro, crying, and muttering inarticulate sounds. The nurse was filling a teapot from the kettle on the fire. Godsmark was descending the stairs, his coat over his arm, his wonderful eyes shining with grief.

I went straight up to the woman and said to her : “ Why do you weep ? Your child is passionately happy. He is with God. Have you never heard of heaven ? Don’t you know what it is like ? Heaven is so beautiful that no thought of ours can imagine it. It’s wildly, gloriously, everlastingly happy. And your child is there. In the light. In the joy. Surrounded by angels. He has been blest by Christ. He has looked into the face of God.”

The mother, I remember, stared at me for the first moment or two with amazement. Then she smiled. She sat back in her chair, clasped her hands together, and quite happily exclaimed, “ If it’s true—if it’s true ! ”

Godsmark said, "It is true."

The nurse, who was looking at me, said, "I know it's true." And then she put the teapot down on the table, went over to the mother, kneeled beside her, and said with the most earnest conviction: "Ask God to forgive you all your sins that you may one day see your child again; and when you go back to London plead with your husband till he too falls before God asking forgiveness for his sins; and teach your other children to love God and to love goodness and to help others; and then you will *know*, you will *know*, that one day you will all be perfectly happy in the heaven of heavens where your little one is waiting for you."

The mother cried, "Forgive me my sins! forgive me my sins!" Her face looked quite noble as she raised it. She lifted her hands. There was a singular light in her eyes and on her brow.

Godsmark said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE TRAIN TO LONDON

I MUST now furnish my own personal account of the wonderful things which happened in London on that memorable and holy day, the 23rd of April—England's Day, St. George's Day, Shakespeare's Day.

With many of these events, of course, the public is now perfectly familiar ; but since I was in some manner, however dimly, vaguely, and uncertainly, warned of the Visitation, and since in all the events to which I shall refer I was myself able to trace the same source of inspiration, the same thread of a divine purpose, and since there is as yet no record in existence of these miraculous events linking them up with some single and positive cause, I shall make no apology to the reader for a narrative which may seem on occasion to repeat the oft-repeated.

I left the cottage on the Dorsetshire moors, went back to the hotel, packed my luggage, and departed by the eight o'clock train for London. Throughout

all these movements I was conscious of a singular happiness, a singular and most compelling certainty that everything which Christianity declares to be true is indeed absolutely, entirely, and gloriously true.

And yet I had no feeling whatever of religious fanaticism. I did not want to cry "God bless you" to everyone I met in the streets. Godsmark had suggested in the cottage that we should all kneel down together and pray; and I had said to them, "Pray in secret, pray alone, pray when you have shut the door." And now I felt as if there were no need to pray. I was perfectly assured of the Divine Presence in the world. Every breath I drew was a blessing. My heart beat with hosannahs and thanksgiving. I was almost laughing in my soul with the sheer elation of a living faith in a living God. It seemed too good to be true. But I knew that it was true. I knew as I have never known anything before in my life that it was true.

I bought newspapers at the station and glanced at them with a delightful amazement. It seemed like a mad world—a preposterous, fantastical world! What did it matter whether stocks rose or fell, what did it matter whether the Land Bill would do this or that, what did it matter if Germany was increasing her Navy, what did it matter if the

Socialists were plotting a general strike, what did all these things matter, these things and murder trials, and divorce cases, and racing news, and actions for libels, and clerical meetings to fight Welsh Disestablishment, and Orange meetings to resist Home Rule, what did all these things matter now that it was certain, absolutely and perfectly certain, that God existed, that immortality was true ?

When I changed at Wareham Station the door of my carriage was opened for me by a porter whom I had noticed on several occasions for his surliness and bad manners. He greeted me now with a smile, spoke cheerfully of the "glorious weather," and was exceedingly kind and attentive. Struck by the change in this man's manner, I came out from myself and looked about me. There seemed quite certainly and obviously to be a general cheerfulness pervading the whole station. I think that everybody put it down to the fine weather. I heard people saying to each other what a good day it was. I noticed porters helping peasant women who had detrained with baskets from third-class carriages.

I was alone in the carriage of the London train till we reached Bournemouth. Two men entered there and sat opposite to each other at the further end of the carriage. They were friends, but they

did not speak for some time—opening their papers and reading in complete silence for some quarter of an hour. Then, one of these men, who was gloomy in appearance, with a rather angry and malevolent expression in his eyes, said bitterly, as he threw one of his newspapers aside, “Surely it’s time that somebody shot Lloyd George!”

His companion laid down his paper in a leisurely fashion, smiled genially, and said, “What a fuss they are all making about politics! What lies they tell, what distortions and exaggerations, what humbug, what dreadful humbug!”

The other man looked at him with surprise.

“I know what you’re thinking,” said his friend, “you’re thinking that I’ve changed my mind. Well, I have. And I’ll tell you when I changed it. I changed it early this morning, when you were fast asleep in bed!” He laughed and stretched his legs, taking off his hat, which he placed on the seat beside him.

He glanced at me for a moment, as though he invited me to listen to him, and smiling very cheerfully began to speak again. His face was not handsome by any means, but it was attractive and pleasant by reason of a large and tolerant benignity which seemed to shine from it. At another time I might have taken him for a vulgar flatulent fellow

talking for effect, but on this occasion I was disposed to regard him, and indeed all men, with sympathy and indulgent kindness.

He said : " I woke early this morning. The sun came through my window and called me. A nice cool wind entered by the open window and told me to get up. I got up. I thought to myself, 'I'll put some sea air into my lungs before I catch the train for London.' I took a cold bath, dressed, and walked to the cliff. I felt good. I appreciated the world. I stood there and just loved being alive. And as I stood there, the sun at my side, the sea twinkling in front of me, and the soft warm wind in my face, it came to me that life ought to be, and could be, good for everybody. What does life need for happiness ? Politics ? Acts of Parliament ? Fighting speeches and snarling newspapers ? Not a bit of it ! Not a bit of it ! "

He laughed and glanced at me again. " What does it need ? " he continued, turning to his friend. " I'll tell you. I'll tell you in one word." He leaned forward and tapped his friend on the knee. " It needs Kindness."

His friend took off his eye-glasses, folded them up, and inserted them into his handkerchief pocket with meticulous slowness. Then he said, " Rot ! "

The other burst out laughing.

“Rot!” repeated the lugubrious man. Then speaking quickly and with considerable acerbity, he said: “A little fine weather has got into your head, like wine. You’re intoxicated. What the world needs is a dictator. Kindness is for pet dogs and canaries. Humanity needs discipline. Europe is making straight for anarchy because it’s soft. It’s soft with liberty and sentimentalism and humanitarianism. Run your business on the lines of Kindness and see where it leads you! These Radicals are trying to run the British Empire on sentimental lines and they’re smashing up the show. Life’s a struggle. Life’s hard. There’s no kindness in nature, not a scrap. If men stop struggling and grappling and wrestling, everything comes to ruin.”

The other man replied: “My dear old fellow, don’t you see that all the mess we’ve made of things is due to just that line of business you’re in love with? Don’t you see that Lloyd George is simply trying to clear up that mess? He won’t do it. He can’t do it. Nothing on earth can do it, except Kindness. But the muddle and confusion which have placed him where he is are the creation of your gospel—the gospel of struggle, the gospel of punching a man in the face when he gets in your road, the gospel of treading down the miserable wretches who fall by the way, the gospel of universal ju-jitsu!

Why, we've had nothing else all the time. The world has never tried Kindness. Individuals have tried it, and but for them we should have gone to pot centuries ago—yes, you bet we should!—but the world has never tried to conduct its affairs on the lines of Kindness. That's why things are all at sixes and sevens. Why, look at the world. It's like a madhouse ! ”

They argued in this manner all the way to London. The lugubrious man challenged his friend to introduce Kindness into his business ; and the other retaliated by mentioning large and prosperous firms who had established co-partnership and who had provided their employees with comfortable houses, pleasure-grounds, gymnasia, and reading-rooms.

“ Look at the other way of doing business ! ” exclaimed the cheerful man. “ Look at strikes, for instance ! What do you think of strikes ? Are they logical, are they reasonable, are they common sense ? Is that the way to conduct business ? ”

The other said, “ Who make the strikes ? A lot of confounded agitators ! ”

“ But,” laughed the other man, “ don't you agree that masters have a right to lock out their men ? ”

“ Of course they have.”

“ Then haven't the men a right to withhold their labour ? ”

“They have the right, but there’d be no need if it wasn’t for agitators.”

“But the thing happens! Don’t you see it happens? That’s my point. That’s what I’m driving at. You get lock-outs, and strikes, and agitators, and Insurance Bills, and Limehouse speeches *because* the whole thing is unnatural. They couldn’t exist if natural Kindness ruled the roost. I’ve been interested in politics all my life, but I see the folly of them now. I’m converted! I say that Tory and Radical are both as bad as each other, and both equally wrong, equally absurd. There’s only one thing for it. Kindness.”

“Why not,” I said, “call it Religion?”

The jovial fellow almost left his seat to embrace me. “You’ve said it,” he cried out. “I wasn’t brave enough. I softened it to Kindness. But that’s what I meant. Religion. Only one thing can save humanity, and that’s Religion.”

The other man said, contemptuously, “Rather an old remedy, isn’t it?”

His friend was about to reply, but checked and looked at me. I said to the lugubrious man, “Is it so old?”

“I thought so.”

“Not so old as the discipline of despotism.”

“Perhaps not.”

“And those who *have* tried it say that it does what it professes to do.”

“Indeed ? ”

“Indeed.”

He looked at me with the utmost disfavour, and said : “When I hear the Sermon on the Mount preached in the Stock Exchange, and when I see those principles of conduct practised in the Bank of England, I’ll consider religion as a remedy for political confusion.”

“Wouldn’t it be better,” I asked, “if you first tried it in your own life ? Forgive me for the suggestion, but you do not seem to me a happy man.”

He stared at me angrily, and made no answer.

“Shall I tell you how to begin ? ” I asked—and I was not in the least surprised by my audacity—
“Begin by humbling yourself in the dust before the majesty of Almighty God. Humble yourself till you feel your heart break. Then rise and go into the world, not to see how much you can get out of your fellow-creatures, but how much goodness you can do, how much kindness you can show, how many men and women and little sorrowful poor children you can comfort, help, and save. That’s Religion. Have you ever tried it ? Have you ever once said in your whole life, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ ? Believe me, God exists. Believe me, your soul will

rise from the dead. The Stock Exchange is not eternal. The Bank of England is not so old as the Decalogue. Many things will pass. Even the British Empire may pass. But your soul is immortal. God exists."

He made no answer.

Very quietly, in quite a different tone of voice, his friend said to him : "God exists ! It's true. God really does exist. And that alters everything."

CHAPTER IX

THE WHEEL BEGINS TO TURN

AS I walked up the platform of Waterloo Station—it was just after eleven o'clock and I had eaten no mouthful of food since the previous night—the same strange feeling of confident elation which had come to me on the Dorsetshire cliffs that morning held me and sustained me in an atmosphere of the most satisfying peace and joy.

It was as if I walked on air. It was as if the golden ether of my vision bathed all the common world for me in translucent glory. I knew that God existed. I knew that blessing had come from heaven. I felt sure that the longing of all faithful hearts was now to be fulfilled.

But in what way blessing was to come, and what form it was to take, I did not know, and I think I did not even trouble to conjecture. If my memory is right, I am disposed to think that my rational brain was overpowered—not in suspense—was overpowered by spiritual ecstasy. I thought. I

reflected. I received impressions and I was conscious of sensations. But my brain lay, if I may so express it, like a happy and delighted child on the bosom of my soul, which was transfigured by the thought of God. My rational brain had no doubts, no apprehensions. It was trustful, restful, confident.

One thing I remember distinctly. A line from the Psalms came into my mind as I walked up the platform. I found myself saying, "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." And I felt that this was extraordinarily true. I mean, it really did seem to me that my spirit penetrated and interpenetrated my whole body, so that the flesh itself was conscious and articulate, so that I myself, in spirit, mind, and body, was crying out for the living God, crying out for joy and delight of the living God.

And I was not surprised at this most unusual frame of mind—if one may so call it. It did not strike me as strange or incongruous. I felt myself to be perfectly rational, perfectly natural—not in the least excited or fanatical. I seemed to know that if every man in the world were so completely certain of God's existence as I was, he would be conscious of sensations exactly equivalent to my own.

I was watching my luggage being placed in the front of a taxi-cab when I felt my arm touched and heard my name called by a welcome and familiar voice. I looked round and encountered my friends the two Miss Kerringtons, in whose charming and restful house in Surrey I had so often spent delightful days.

These very refined women, fairly well off, exceedingly cultured, and devoted to their garden, stood before me with a look in their pleasant faces which I had never before observed there.

"We're perfectly mad," said Cynthia, laughing.

"Mad as March hares," smiled Augusta.

"What do you think has come to us?" said Cynthia, drawing closer to me, laying a hand on my arm, and raising her kind face to mine with an expression of amusement. "I was in the garden before breakfast, when it suddenly occurred to me that I was the most odiously selfish woman alive. I felt that I must instantly go and tell Augusta. I walked straight off towards the house to do so. And do you know, just as I was mounting the steps to the terrace, Augusta looked out of her bedroom window, and said to me, 'Cynthia, we're the most detestable old cats in the world.' The same thought had come to her!"

"Wasn't it strange?" asked Augusta. "I was just pinning on my jabot when something seemed to say to me, 'Augusta, you think of nobody but yourself; you're a cat, a perfect cat.' I looked at myself in the glass, and said, 'So I am; a selfish cat. I must tell Cynthia.' And I got up and looked out of the window . . ."

"It was a brain wave," said Cynthia.

"Telepathy," said Augusta.

"And we agreed at breakfast," said Cynthia, "that we would at once begin to do things for other people. And so here we are. We are going to drive to St. James's Square and see the Bishop of London. We are going to tell him that we've got five spare bedrooms, three acres of garden, and a thousand a year between us, and that we want to coddle the wives of poor curates when they're run down and disheartened; and the children, too, if they aren't too messy and mischievous!"

"We feel," said Augusta, "that we must do something."

I saw them into a cab, and as I closed the door I looked through the window-space into their nice, kind faces, and said to them, "Do you know what has happened to you? You believe in God."

Cynthia looked at Augusta, and Augusta looked

at Cynthia. "That's a brain wave!" said Cynthia.

"I was just going to say the same thing myself," said Augusta. "Isn't that extraordinary?"

"We've always thought there was a God . . ."

"But now we know it!"

When I got to the door of my cab, where the porter was still standing at the open door, I said, without having thought of the direction before, "Tell him to drive to 32 John Street, Theobald's Road." And the porter, shutting the door, smiled at me, looked at me quite affectionately, and said, "I know that address well, sir. Ragged School Union. Sir John Kirk. Crutch and Kindness League. One of my little ones is a cripple. They're mighty kind to her. She can't speak too highly of the League."

What did I propose to do there? I did not know. Why did I think of going there? I cannot tell. Every year I sent Sir John Kirk five guineas; three or four times I had encountered him at drawing-room meetings; on one occasion he had been kind enough to show me something of the tragedy of Hoxton Market. But I knew other men in the same way. I subscribed to several similar charities. I cannot tell what put the idea into my head.

As I entered the offices of the Ragged School Union, Sir John Kirk came from his room with the Duke of Gloucester. We greeted each other, and then the Duke said to me :

“An idea occurred to me at breakfast this morning. It suddenly struck me that I had got two big places in the country standing empty, and likely to be empty all the summer. I thought to myself, Why not let the Ragged School Union fill them up with children ? How they'd enjoy romping in the gardens, going round the farm, playing in the fields, larking in the woods ! It seemed to me a perfectly excellent idea. Then I reflected that I had better consult the Duchess. I walked to her room, and by Jove, what do you think ? My dear fellow, she was just coming to me with an almost identical suggestion ! Isn't that remarkable ? What do people call it—a brain wave, isn't it ? Well, anyhow, we've arranged it now. The Duchess will have to find the servants and engage nurses, and Sir John here is going to find the children. I fancy we shall go down ourselves and see how they get on.”

“I think,” said Sir John, “that we have found a second Lord Shaftesbury in His Grace.”

“Oh, no ! not at all,” protested the Duke. “Shaftesbury was unique. A man raised up by

Providence. I am merely fond of children and glad to be of any service I can, but I'm quite unworthy to be likened to Lord Shaftesbury."

While he was speaking, Mr. Solomon Michael, the banker, entered the office. Sir John Kirk introduced him to the Duke and spoke of him as a true friend of the League.

"Oh, but," said Mr. Michael, "we ought all of us to do a great deal more. It's our privilege. And I think we ought not to content ourselves with giving money. We ought to help with our own hearts and with our own hands. I am not a Christian in the ecclesiastical sense, but I am a Christian in the human sense. I count it a privilege to help the Ragged School Union. Jewish charities are good, but there is too much red tape. In the Ragged School Union you make room for the heart."

He said that an idea had come to him that morning which he would like to discuss with Sir John Kirk.

As I had nothing myself to propose, I said that I would call again, and leaving Kirk and Michael together, I went into the street with the Duke, where the taxi-cab was waiting with my luggage.

"I can't help thinking," said the Duke, taking my arm to slow my paces, and speaking in the manner of one who can only utter inmost and unusual

thoughts very nonchalantly, "that if well-off and leisured people—for leisure's a form of wealth—showed a personal interest in the poor—subscriptions are very little use by themselves—I say, my dear fellow, I can't help thinking that if we did our duty in this way, all of us, and thoroughly, there'd be an end of class jealousies, class hatreds, class warfare. I feel it strongly. I'm sure of it. But look how we live ! The classes are as separated as passengers on a liner. The upper-classes live entirely separate from the middle-classes. The middle-classes have no social connection with the lower-classes. And the lower-classes inhabit a world entirely of their own—a sordid, struggling, joyless, anxious world. What we have to do is not to break down class distinctions, that is impossible ; but to break down the geographical barriers of the classes. We must all live together. We must share the world between us."

With this sentiment I agreed cordially.

"And I think, too," said the Duke, rather unwillingly, and yet with great conviction, "that our fellows have made a mistake in abusing Lloyd George like a pickpocket. It has only made him worse. What they should have done, I think, was to co-operate with him, to claim him as their own man, to work for exactly the same ends. It is not

what he does that is dangerous, it's the manner and the spirit in which he does it. And that manner and spirit would have been entirely innocuous if we had shown him sympathy and expressed admiration for his ideals. After all, I mean, are not his ideals the ideals which every—well, every true Christian ought to cherish in his heart? If we really believed in our religion, I mean, should we not desire to abolish slums, to give every child a chance of growing up good, strong, intelligent, to remove every anxiety and distress from the working-man and the working-woman? What's that text?—*Bear ye one another's burdens*, isn't it? Well, that's religion. If we did that, my dear fellow, depend upon it there'd be no class warfare and no fear of a revolution."

"You are perfectly right, Duke," I replied—"perfectly. And I'll tell you, if you'll let me, what you yourself should do at once. You must go and speak to that effect in the House of Lords this afternoon. You must speak to that effect in your house—in your club—everywhere. Make yourself a missionary of the millennium. Don't fear a revolution. It isn't coming. Work for the kingdom of God. It's at hand."

He said to me as we were about to part, "I tell you what makes the difference in a man's views and in

his attitude towards life—it's really and truly believing that there *is* a God. . . .”

I told my cabman to drive to Canning Town, much to his amazement, and got into the cab intending to see the father of the little child lying dead in Dorsetshire.

CHAPTER X

A REPENTANT LANDLORD

AS I drove through that part of London which we call the City I remarked with some surprise the great number of handsome motor-cars in the traffic. This led me to reflect on the immense wealth of London and also on the change which has taken place in the social position and the moral character of our trading-classes. I wondered what the merchants of sixty or seventy years ago would have thought of this extraordinary spectacle in the London streets—magnificent carriages gliding through the streets and carrying their owners to work at noonday !

But what was my surprise, as they say in story-books, to find that this incessant line of motor-cars did not set down their occupiers in the City, but glided on, as well as the congested traffic would allow them, towards the east end of the town. My surprise was all the greater when I caught sight of

fashionable women in some of these fine carriages. When the City was left behind, and the trams of Whitechapel began, there was still as far as eye could see a line of these splendid vehicles moving forward into the gloom and depression of the Commercial Road.

At last I imagined that some Royal function was to take place. Crowds stood on the pavement's edge. The motor-cars were attracting attention. Children ran at the side of some of the cars, holding out their hands for coppers; women with babies in their arms congregated at the entry of every alley and court; men came from public-houses and stood gaping, frowning, or laughing at the procession of luxury. I should have been quite certain that a function was in progress but for the total absence of flags from the streets.

There was presently a block in the traffic, and a limousine drew alongside of my taxi-cab. I glanced through the window and saw that my neighbour was Lady Edmund Peverel. She saw me and at once came to the window-space. "What does it all mean?" she asked.

"Tell me," I answered.

"Don't you know?"

"Not in the least."

"I can't understand it," she said. "Ever since

I started there has been a regular procession of cars."

Her chauffeur and footman were glancing superciliously at my driver, who was one of those shabby and odious creatures who lounge in their seats, push their caps to the backs of their heads, and endeavour to appear as disreputable and slovenly and cynical as possible.

"Where are you going yourself?" I inquired.

"Oh, an idea came to me at breakfast this morning," she made answer. "It seemed such a beautiful day, and I thought that perhaps it would be a nice thing to do to——"

At that moment my driver let in the clutch and we started forward with a jerk.

Lady Edmund's car passed me, but stopped before I lost sight of it. I felt that I was on the track of the mystery, and told my driver to stop when we reached the place where Lady Edmund had alighted. Other cars, I noticed, were turning off to right and left, moving slowly up narrow streets which seemed to wind into unspeakable squalor.

I caught up with Lady Edmund as she was entering the premises of a Mission. "You were going to tell me?" I said, smiling.

She laughed. "Oh, I am glad you are here,"

she replied. "I am just beginning to feel rather nervous. You see, this is the first time I have ever done anything."

"I believe I know!"

"What do you know?"

"Your purpose."

"Oh, it's nothing wonderful. Only a little odd. I'm going to take some of the poor people about here for a drive. I thought of Kew Gardens, or Hindhead, or perhaps the New Forest. But, you see, I've never done anything like this before. I don't quite know how it will work itself out. It's just an impulse. I felt that it was selfish to have two or three cars doing nothing, and I thought how poor people in East London would enjoy a drive. Then I remembered an appeal for money that had reached me by the morning post from this Mission. I ordered the car, and here I am."

"Do you know," I answered, "that all the other cars you saw in the streets this morning are moving on a similar errand?"

"You don't mean that?"

"I am sure."

"But how has it happened? It can't possibly be that my impulse has communicated itself to half London? It's too odd. It's not the thing

that would occur to everybody. It's rather fantastic and quixotic."

"Nevertheless, the same impulse which has brought you here is scattering these poor quarters with motor-cars."

"It's like a miracle ! "

"But perhaps it is."

She glanced at me with surprise. A cheer from the street made us look round. A motor-car swept past filled with children. They were standing up waving handkerchiefs and little flags, and cheering as hard as they could. Another car just as crowded followed, and then another.

We looked at each other.

"Is it the end of the world ? " Lady Edmund asked.

"Or the beginning ? "

"The beginning of what ? "

"The Kingdom."

She laid her hand on my arm. "Do you believe that ? " she asked. "I wonder ! This morning it seemed to me that I believed in God for the first time in my life."

"Tell me about that "

"Oh, I can't. It's something for which no language has yet been invented. I was just perfectly certain that God exists. I felt marvellously

light and gay. I was elated. I wanted to embrace the world, wanted to mother humanity. I never knew before what love could mean."

"And now?"

"Yes, I am still happy, but I am nervous. If I could be sure that many other people are really doing the same thing I should get back my confidence. Do you really think that this same impulse has come to many?—do you really believe it is a miracle?"

"Yes, it is a miracle. You know that phrase, 'visited and redeemed His people'? I think this is also a Divine Visitation. In some way God has breathed Himself into the world. I knew it early this morning."

She studied me for a moment, and then her face lighted. "Yes, it's true, it's true!" she exclaimed. "Hitherto we have said, 'Perhaps there is a God,' or 'We hope there is a God.' But now we know it. We actually know for certain that there is a God. Oh, what a difference it makes! Come and help me to fill my car!" she concluded, and quite hastened to her work.

In a quarter of an hour we had packed six people into the limousine. Lady Edmund gave them money and told the footman to take them to the Crystal Palace. She then returned to the Mission,

arranged to send some of the workers to her place in Herefordshire, subscribed to the funds, inquired what could be done for the children, and promised to return on the following day.

“And now,” she said, “you must take me in your taxi-cab. Where are you going?”

I told her, and we set out together.

When we arrived at the street where the parents of my little dead godchild had their home we found an old-fashioned landau drawn by a couple of fat steaming horses standing in the gutter close to the very house of our quest. Beside the carriage stood an old white-haired clergyman, exceedingly spruce in his dress, and of rather a worldly appearance. Inside the carriage, leaning towards the window-space, was an old lady arrayed in finery of another period, very rich-looking and very virtuous and choice.

They were joined almost immediately by a man carrying a notebook and a foot-rule, who came from one of the alleys that burrow out of this street. I heard this man say to the old clergyman, “The best thing you can do, sir, is to pull ’em all down and build afresh.”

The clergyman stroked his chin for a moment and then turned to the old lady in the carriage. “What do you think, dear?” he inquired.

Something impelled me to speak to this couple. I asked if they were thinking of pulling down any of the houses in that street, apologising for the question on the ground that I was interested in a family who were probably their tenants.

The clergyman glanced half suspiciously and half guiltily from me to Lady Edmund, and from Lady Edmund to me. Then he began "washing his hands," smiling uneasily, humming and hawing, and finally he turned to his wife.

She said: "My husband has owned property here for some years, but has never before seen it. He thought this morning that he would like to look at it, and if the houses needed any repairs to carry them out. We were both pained to find that the houses are in a very bad condition. Our builder, Mr. Thomas, now recommends us to pull all the houses down and to build better ones in their place. We shall probably do so. But you need be at no anxiety as to the welfare of the family you spoke about. We shall certainly provide for everybody while the change is being made."

"It will cost a great deal of money," said the clergyman.

"Still," said the old lady, "if it is a right and wise thing to do, we shall not grudge the expense."

"I was only thinking, dear," said the old clergy-

man, "that if others are interested in the poor people of this street, perhaps they would like to help in the minor matter of providing for them while the old houses are demolished."

At this point our conversation was interrupted violently.

"Oh, so there he is!" cried a loud-ringing voice, and turning round I saw a tall, thin, grey-faced priest in biretta and cassock striding up to us, surrounded by a grinning group of young hooligans.

As long as I live I shall never forget the tremendous indignation of that towering priest and the shattering effect it made upon the old clergyman. It lives in my memory like an historic prize-fight, a prize-fight of souls, in which a soul frightfully strong and frightfully merciless hammered a weaker soul to a gelatinous condition of impotence.

"So you have come at last!" cried the priest, striding up to us and addressing the old clergyman. "Come to look at your property, come to smell the odours of crime, poverty, and destitution, come to feast your eyes on God's image distorted by evil and want and misery into the likeness of Satan. You've done well out of it. Old man, you've made money out of it—money, money, money! You've made money out of wretchedness, and want, and drunkenness, and crime. You own a couple of

public-houses. You own at least seven bawdy-houses. I've written and told you so a hundred times. You've refused to answer my letters. So long as you got the rents, what the hell did you care? I say, what *the hell* did you care? You're well-dressed; you live in a nice large house on Hampstead Heath; you've got a carriage; you fare sumptuously every day; and if you go to preach for some poor devil of a vicar in the suburbs who has given his lean curate a fortnight's holiday you charge a guinea for your old sermon. God have mercy on your soul! I say, God have mercy on your soul! What will He say to you when your soul appears before Him? What will Christ say to you?—the Christ you've spent your whole life first in misrepresenting and then in ignoring. Will He say the great 'Inasmuch' to you? Do you expect it? Are you counting on it? Tell us, tell us—you've got a congregation about you—tell us all here what you expect in the next world. Tell us what you have *done*. Have you done anything? Have you ever visited your seven bawdy-houses to save the women there? Have you ever preached in your beer-shops? Have you ever clothed the naked and fed the hungry in your slums? Tell us, old man, tell us what you have done. You replied to my first letter that your agent

would report to you. What did he report? Tell us that. You never answered my other letters. Why not? Tell us why you never answered them. I am a priest of your own Church. I follow the same Master. Why did you flout me?—why did you treat me as a liar? You have family prayers, they tell me; your servants listen to you reading the Gospel before they bring in your omelette and your coffee and your toast. But afterwards—what do you do afterwards? Do you live the life? Tell us what you do. You send a guinea a year to Dr. Barnardo, a guinea a year to the London Hospital, a guinea a year to the Church Missionary Society. But what do you do? How many children have you sheltered, how many poor people have you fed and clothed, how many prisons have you visited? You're rich—rich in money and rich in leisure. What have you done? Tell us all, what have you done? Think of all the time you've had on your hands. Think of the idle days. What have you done? Why is it you have come here to-day? If to-day, why not yesterday? What have you done with all your yesterdays? Didn't these houses want painting and papering yesterday? Didn't the roof want mending, the fireplaces restoring, the drains inspecting? Why have you come to-day? Are you afraid of the County

Council? The County Council!—why, you’ve flouted God for years. All these years! Think of it, you’ve flouted God Almighty for years, and now you’re afraid of the County Council!”

The clergyman’s wife, who had first withdrawn into the carriage and then glanced out from the window-space endeavouring to check the torrential flow of the priest’s anger, now opened the carriage door and stepped out on the pavement. She took her husband’s arm—she was several inches taller—and confronting the priest, spoke to him as follows, in a low voice which slightly trembled with feeling:

“My husband is a very delicate man; he is not able to make journeys, and he is not able to attend to business. He has been obliged to trust his agent, and so far the reports of the agent have not conveyed to his mind the serious condition of his property. But now that he has seen it for himself he intends to pull down all the houses and build better ones in their place. You will find him, if you come and see us, most willing to assist in your work and do what he can for your people.”

“I will do nothing,” said the old clergyman, “nothing at all for a Jesuit masquerading as an English clergyman.” He munched his lips together for a moment, and then suddenly stamping his foot on the pavement he exclaimed passionately:

“How dare you speak to me as you have spoken just now? Your place is with Rome. You take the pay of the Church of England and do the work of the Scarlet Woman. You’re dishonest. You’re a cheat. If you had not been a Papist I should have answered your letters; I should have come here before. You’ve got pictures in your church, and images of the Virgin. You burn incense. You wear heathen and unholy vestments. You prostrate yourself before the Crucifix. And you reserve the Sacrament.”

The priest watched the vehemence of the old white-faced and trembling clergyman with a look of genuine curiosity. Then he said to him: “Landlord, what do you know about the Church of Christ? Examine your heart. What do you know about His Church? Tell us, what are the tests of Judgment Day? What does Christ Himself say will be the tests of Judgment Day? Do you know?”

“I’ll have nothing to do with you,” said the old clergyman, moving towards his carriage.

“There’s nothing about vestments and images in Christ’s account of Judgment Day,” said the priest. “He doesn’t say a word about creed or ritual. He speaks of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and of hospitality to the friendless. How do you stand there, old Landlord? How do

you stand there, old Humbug? Have you fed the hungry?—by Heaven, you've taken rent from them! Have you clothed the naked, visited the sick, taken in the stranger?—no, by Heaven, you've made a profit out of them! Listen. I've seen thousands of men, women, and children go to hell in streets owned by you. Where were you? What did you say or do to save them? Did you care? Did you care a snap whether they went to heaven or hell? You judge me. But why didn't you build a church to your own way of thinking in this very street? Why didn't you come down and preach the true Gospel? You've got seven bawdy-houses. Could you not have spared one and built a church on its dust and ashes——”

The clergyman almost sprang at him. “I know nothing of these bawdy-houses, nothing, nothing, nothing! I'm not responsible. I'm the superior landlord. I can't break my leases.”

“Tell that to God at Judgment Day!” cried the priest.

The old lady interrupted. “You cannot have heard what I said,” she muttered in a quick and nervous tone; “my husband intends to pull down these houses and build new ones.”

“That is good enough for to-morrow, madam,” answered the priest, “but what of yesterday?”

What of the thousands who have died and gone to hell in these houses ? ”

“ You were here to tell them the means of salvation,” she retorted.

“ I have not been idle,” he answered angrily. “ I have lived with them, starved with them, suffered with them. And sometimes—because of you, because of you—I doubted with them the existence of a God of Love. That is what you have done. You have made it hard for men, women, and children to believe in a God of Love. Many have died in your damnable houses cursing His Name.”

The crowd, which had hitherto listened with a strange seriousness to this discussion, and which had become much larger, now showed unmistakable signs of hostility towards the clergyman and his wife. Several very foul-faced women were in this mob, and they directed angry scowls and muttered bitter words, not only at the clergyman and his wife, but at Lady Edmund and me, whom they evidently took to be of the landlord’s party.

The clergyman’s wife turned to me and said confidentially in my ear : “ There is much truth in what this priest says. We have indeed left undone many things which we ought to have done. We both felt that most strangely this morning. We both *wished* to come down here and do whatever

we could for these poor people. And we intend to do much for them. Henceforward we shall be constantly in their midst. I acknowledge frankly our sins in the past ; I feel guilty and ashamed ; I pray that God will forgive us our neglect. But this is not the place for a violent discussion. I beg you earnestly to put a stop to it."

I felt how unseemly this wrangle was, and going to the priest I begged him to give me a few minutes of his time.

In this sudden interlude of peace a drunken man came shouting and reeling through the crowd. He drove people to right and left of him, lurching first towards the gutters and then plunging with his head down and his legs giving under him against the greasy slum walls. On seeing the priest he stopped abruptly, raised his head, frowned with his glazed eyes, and began to mumble words that set people laughing.

I recognised the father of the child lying dead in Dorsetshire.

The priest went to him at once. "Catch hold of my arm," he said ; "I'll take you home."

The clergyman and his wife entered their carriage, followed by the builder. The crowd surged round them, some laughing and some hissing. Lady Edmund caught my arm and said to me, "I

must go home. I am not afraid, but I want to think."

I said to her, "Will you leave my luggage for me in Hertford Street? The cab can then take you home. I will come and see you to-night. But for the present I must stay here."

When the cab had gone I followed the priest and the drunkard to the end of the street.

CHAPTER XI

VISION OF A SOUL

THE door of the house stood open. As I entered the priest was standing over the drunkard, who sprawled on a disagreeable unmade bed in a corner of the dark ill-smelling room. The voice of the priest was not so passionate and harsh as it had been in his onslaught on the clergyman, but it was nevertheless full of judgment.

I studied his face with interest, because it was one of those faces in which one may see quite visibly a natural brutality dedicated to God. The grey eyes were small and bitter and puffed; the nose was brief, like a burglar's; the thick upper lip projected and was full of sullen energy; the chin was small, pointed, and contentious. This man might easily have been a criminal. Mediæval painters might have taken him for a model of Satan. There was no sign of refinement in his features, no suggestion of tenderness or sweetness in his expression. It was the face of an evil spirit that, by

some miracle, had been wrenched into the service of God.

To add to the strange effect of this coarse and powerful face, the voice was hoarse, the pronunciation was brutal ; and when he was greatly moved the greyness of his skin was suffused with blood, his small eyes seemed to close, and his large loose mouth writhed with the force of his invective.

He was telling the drunkard, who lay blinking at him in a dazed stupor, that without a doubt his soul was in peril of hell. "Nothing can save you," he cried, "nothing can save you from the most hideous suffering and the most frightful agonies but repentance and a cry to Christ. Do you understand that ? You are drunk, but God has left you a corner of comprehension. You can hear me. My words reach to your brain. You are neither unconscious nor so drunk that language has no meaning. Listen, then. If you died at this moment you would go to hell. You would go to the place where murderers and tyrants and bloodsuckers and devils swelter in agony and rot in corruption. Your soul would scream in its torture, but it would not desire God—you have broken the thread of aspiration after holiness that links the soul with God. No, you would lie writhing in a mass of devilries and horrors, burned up by iniquity, and yet existing

in the throes of indestructible remorse—*unconscious of God*. Are you prepared for hell? Do you know what you are laying up for yourself? You have rejected heaven, you have cursed Christ, you have turned your back on the God Who made you for Himself; but do you know where you are going, what you are doing for yourself? Have you ever thought what it means for a soul to live in everlasting hell? Don't deceive yourself. Don't think you will scrape into heaven. Heaven is for the pure in heart, for the unselfish, for the holy, for those who have loved and served God. No drunkard can enter heaven. No vile and beastly thing can enter heaven. Heaven is for joy. Filthiness and vileness go to hell."

He turned and saw me standing in the room. I explained the reason of my presence. When he had heard me he swung round and bent over the drunkard. "Listen! Listen!" he cried, close to the man's ear. "Your child died this morning. Your wife is now sitting by the corpse. The soul of your child is in the presence of God. What did you do for that soul? What did you do for its body? Will that child pray for you in heaven? Will it beseech God for His mercy for you. Your child is dead—your child for whom you are responsible—and you are drunk! Where is the other

child ? where is your little boy ? Do you know ? Do you care ? Has he had food this morning ? Did you give him breakfast ? Did you say kind words to him before he went to school ? *Why is he not here now ?* ”

He caught the man by the shoulder. “In the Name of Christ, rouse yourself. Rouse yourself, drunkard ! Save your soul, you dreadful sot ! One of your children is dead ; the other is in the streets—*he dare not come home, he is afraid of you,* and there is nothing to eat. What does God think of you ? Rouse yourself. What does God think of you ? Die now, and you go to hell. For ever and ever you will suffer in hell. Are you prepared for that ? Have you counted the cost ? Do you think God will have anything to do with such an infamous wretch, such a vile and filthy beast as you ? No ! No ! You will go to hell. You will burn, you will writhe, you will scream, you will try to tear yourself in pieces, but you will exist, for ever and ever—for ever and ever, with all the devils and swine and serpents and worms of hell.”

I was frightfully shocked by the fury of this implacable priest, and felt a dull sympathy for the offensive person snorting and sweating on the dirty bed. But I could not convince myself that what the priest said so violently and dreadfully was untrue. It

was impossible to imagine that a creature who had violated all natural law, who had deliberately rejected conscience, and who had chosen a road leading in the very opposite direction from love, beauty, and self-sacrifice, could ever arrive at the same goal to which the saints travel with hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The man said in a low voice, "I may be bad, Father; I don't say I'm not; but whose fault is it? If you had been in my shoes you'd be no different."

"Liar and humbug!" cried the priest. "Liar and humbug, as well as drunkard and fool. You are lying to God. Do you know that? Lying to God! You fool, you fool! Do you think to deceive God? You can't even deceive yourself. Ask yourself now, even in your drunken torpor, whether there has ever been a time in your life when you didn't know good from evil? Why, you know the difference now, now in your swinish stupor. Look about you, too. Are there no men in this very street who started as you started, who have had worse luck than you have had, and who are yet good fathers, true husbands, and sober, faithful, virtuous men? What is the difference between you and them? This: They have chosen Christ, and you have rejected Him. That is why you are going down the road of ruin to the hell of everlasting

wretchedness and remorse. *You have rejected Christ.* You have rejected the one Saviour Who can rescue your soul from hell. You don't want Him. You hate Him. You curse His Name, you spurn His sacrifice, you spit in His Face. Don't lie to yourself. Don't whine and prevaricate. You are going to hell because you have deliberately rejected your means of salvation. No one else has had anything to do with it. You yourself, you yourself, and only you yourself, have chosen evil and rejected Christ."

He paused for a moment, watching the surly but somewhat terrified face of the drunkard, and then in a lower and quieter voice he added: "I have warned you. I will say nothing more to you now, and I will never warn you again. Sleep off the fumes of your drunkenness, and then, when you have washed, come to see me if you earnestly and truly repent, if you truly and earnestly desire to be saved from your sins. I have come to you for the last time. Henceforth you must come to me."

He made the sign of the Cross over the drunkard, and then turning about took me by the arm and walked as far as the door. In a lower voice still, little more than a whisper, he said to me at a very extraordinary pace:

"If you think I have spoken too harshly to this

abandoned wretch, or if you think I spoke too violently in the street just now to that miserable hypocrite, I can forgive you with all my heart, because until this morning I myself should have been quite incapable of understanding such denunciation. We all talk about God, priests and infidels, theologians and philosophers, but how many really believe that He exists? If we really believed that He exists, should we dawdle through life, should we let sin drag thousands upon thousands of souls to perdition, should we content ourselves with soft words and pious hopes? Until this morning I have worked hard at my business, but without real faith. I have thought my religion was true, I have hoped that the scheme of my theology represented the truth of things. But this morning, while I was at the altar, suddenly, yes, all of a sudden and like a flash of lightning which dazzles darkness into a brilliance of illumination more wonderful than normal light, I knew that God exists. I wanted instantly to leave the Blessed Sacrament on the altar and rush out into the streets saving the lost and warning the indifferent. It was only by an immense effort that I could finish my priest's work. And when I came out from the church I felt that my conviction of God's Reality would soon go, that it was only a passing comprehension, a

transitory uprush of apprehension, and that I must use it immediately. But it continues. It is stronger now than it was this morning. I KNOW—think what that means—I KNOW that God exists. Don't imagine that I am beside myself. Don't think of me as a feverish fanatic. You would be as I am now, all men would be as I am now, if they were as sure, as overwhelmingly and utterly sure, of God's Reality. But they are not. I was not, till early this morning. I do not judge men for that ; I have compassion on them ; I remember my own darkness and uncertainty. But now that I know for certain of God's Reality I must work as I never worked before. Think what it means ! I am sure of God's Reality : nothing in life is more sure to my soul : and with this knowledge I see men and women on every side of me going to perdition of their own deliberate choice—yes, of their own deliberate choice, but unwarned. Must I not preach : Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ? Must I not cry to mankind that they flee from the wrath to come ? ”

He took my hand. “ Make yourself,” he said, “ an active and a burning servant of God. What does the world need ? Not scholars and philosophers, but John Baptist, Christ Jesus, and Paul the Apostle ! ”

In an instant he would have gone, but as he stepped to the doorway a couple of young hooligans rushed up, excited and wide-eyed. "Father," they cried, "there's more landlords come down! They're going to pull down the whole blooming place. No one will have anywhere to live soon. Come and see them, Father. Regular toffs, one of 'em has a motor-car. They say they'll pull down all the houses—all the blooming lot!"

The priest was puzzled. "What has happened?" he asked in a dazed way. "What does it mean? Is it something to do with the Land Bill?"

I said to him, "No; it's the same force at work that came to you this morning. It acts differently on different souls. But it's the same force."

"I will go and see," he cried, and departed swiftly with the hooligans.

I was about to follow him when something checked me. I turned about, hardly knowing what I did, and walked over to the bed in the corner of the room. The drunkard was lying on his side, his knees drawn up, his hands half folded under his chin, his eyes full of tears.

And now I must set down something very difficult to tell, something that I shrink from confessing. The same force that turned me round at the door

constrains me, however, to narrate my experience at that bedside.

As I stood there, looking down at the drunkard, I suddenly lost all sense of the bed's filthiness, all sense of the drunkard's horrid clothes, all sense of the drunkard's hideous and repulsive face. Dare I say that everything became to me as I think everything must have appeared to Christ? *I saw only the man's soul.*

I saw something imprisoned and perishing and struggling for breath. I saw a captive dying in a slow agony, but making faint battle for existence. And what I saw was not dark and disgustful, but exceedingly sad and wonderfully lovely.

I stooped down and kissed the drunkard's cheek. I placed my hand upon his head and blessed him. I kneeled at his side and, taking both his hands in mine, I said to him :

"God loves you. Even as a father pities his children, God loves and pities you. He is only waiting for you to turn to Him. God is love. He loves you, He yearns for you, and if you turn at this moment all heaven will ring with joy, for you will be saved from sin. All that you have done, all that you now are, will be wiped away. God is waiting. The angels are waiting. Your little child in heaven is waiting for your salvation. Cry to God,

Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son. Bow your head and say aloud, God be merciful to me a sinner. Do this and you will know that you are saved. Sin will have no more dominion over you."

He lifted his head, sitting up on the dirty bed, looked at me for a long time, and made answer : "It's done. I'm born again. There's no need to cry for mercy now. It's come already. It came when you kissed me."

He stood up, perfectly sober and perfectly calm. He surveyed his desolate home for a moment, looking on every side of him, and then he said : "I've got such strength in me as I never had before. I'll make a beginning now." He took off his coat and flung it on the bed. As he rolled up his shirt-sleeves he said, "Come back in half an hour's time and see what I've done." He smiled and gave me his hand.

"What are you going to do ? " I asked.

"Get dinner for my boy."

CHAPTER XII

CHILDBIRTH

A NURSE in uniform, bright-faced, and really beautiful with animation, attracted my attention as I issued from the narrow alley where the father of my dead godchild had just begun to build up a new life.

This charming young creature had crossed the road as I entered the main thoroughfare. She was standing on the kerb looking to right and left of her in evident quest of some by-turning. At her side, somewhat timorous and uneasy, was a woman of fashion, whose elaborate garments made a vivid contrast in the general gloom of this down-at-heel neighbourhood. The nurse was perhaps twenty-three or twenty-four years of age ; her companion, powdered and enamelled, was probably fifty.

"I think we must go up this street," said the nurse.

"But is it safe? It looks dreadful," said her companion.

"Can I be of any service to you?" I asked the

nurse, for a desire to make her acquaintance had entered my mind at the first sight of her.

She told me that she was looking for a certain court which was not in her district, and that she could not determine which way to go. I was unable to tell her, but as I looked about a shabby man approached and asked where we wanted to go. When we told him he said it was up the street I had just left, and offered to conduct us to it. The lady at once touched my arm and asked me in a low voice to go with them on this perilous journey.

As we walked behind the shabby man, she said to me : “ Of course, we all ought to help the poor, but really the risks are positively appalling. Not only is there danger of violence, for one might be easily murdered in these back streets, but the risk of contagion is simply enormous. I have already encountered such odours as would have killed me yesterday, and some of the people I have passed in the streets must be really swarming with insects. I never saw such people. I did not know such creatures exist. It is scandalous, I think, that they should be allowed to live in this manner. What the medical officers of health have been doing, and the inspectors of the County Council, I cannot imagine. And it makes one positively despair. That is the appalling thing about it. I started out this morning

with the feeling that I had only got to go down to the East End to put a stop to all this dreadful class hatred which is driving England to ruin. I thought I would visit these dear maternity nurses, give them enough money to last for a year, make arrangements to send two or three hundred poor mothers into the country, and then buy a few houses here and there, pull them down and set up in their place large and cheerful nurseries for the children—I thought I had only to do this to show the East End that the West End is not indifferent to their sufferings and privations. But the East End is endless. It goes on for ever and ever. One would have to possess the wealth of the world to do anything big enough to make an impression. And so one despairs. Frankly, I despair. What's the use? Why have I come? What can I do? Only a revolution can save society. I'm perfectly certain that if I lived in a place like this I should be an anarchist. I should want to blow everybody up. Look at those awful women glowering at us from the opposite side of the way! I declare they frighten me to death."

The nurse assured the voluble fat lady that she was perfectly safe, and looking at me with her bright engaging smile, she asked if I had come to minister to East London.

"Everybody," she said, "seems to have taken it

into his or her head to pay us a visit. I never saw such a lot of respectable people here before ! And one of our nurses told me it's the same in Silvertown—landlords have come to inspect their property, ladies have appeared with motor-cars to take poor people for drives, subscribers to the various missions and charities have all turned up at the same moment to ask what they can do. It's a most extraordinary thing. And yet, do you know, I had a strange feeling this morning ; I really had ; I had a feeling that something was going to happen. I felt most awfully happy ; unusually cheerful ; I couldn't stop singing while I was dressing. And other nurses were just the same. And one of the Sisters, who is usually rather grumpy, was quite nice and considerate. Everybody seemed happier and kinder. But all the same I can't understand this extraordinary invasion of the East."

I smiled, and said to her : " Suppose that this is what has happened : Everybody in London who pretends to be religious or who tries to be religious, actually is religious to-day. Wouldn't that account for it ? "

" But," exclaimed the fashionable lady, " I for one am always religious ! I was confirmed by dear Archbishop Benson, and ever since that day I have never once had a doubt—not a single doubt."

“Do you mean,” the nurse asked me, “that a miracle has happened?”

“He’s absurdly wrong,” said the lady. “What he says amounts to this, that until to-day nobody has been religious. What nonsense! Forgive me for saying so, but what nonsense.”

“Well, what is your explanation?” I inquired.

“It’s simply the weather,” she said. “Everybody knows that the weather affects people. One day I feel as sweet as an angel, on the next I could snap anybody’s nose off. While we are in the flesh we are bound to suffer from the temperature of the air and the colour of the clouds. We should be angels if we were not.”

“But,” I said argumentatively, “there have been days quite as fine and cheerful as this.”

“Of course there have,” she answered. “To-day is really too warm for the time of year. I find the air very oppressive.”

The nurse laughed, glancing at me with amusement as if anxious for my recognition of her quickness to see the lady’s foolish position. “Then, why are you here?” she inquired, turning to the fat lady and raising her eyebrows almost coquettishly. “And why didn’t you come before?”

Puffing and blowing a little, our companion replied, “There was an unusual kindness in the air

this morning. I noticed it directly I woke up. We live in Wimbledon, and we have a big garden. As soon as I woke, when my maid came with my cup of tea, I felt that it would be a pleasure to be kind. The sun shone in at the open window ; the birds were singing ; I could smell the freshness of the dew. I said to my maid, ' What a beautiful morning.' And she said, ' It is, madam ; and you really ought to be out in the garden—it's like heaven.' That's what my maid said. Even she felt it."

At this point in our conversation we were stopped by the shabby man in front of us, who came to a halt, and indicated the court for which the nurse was searching. I gave him a shilling and he went off quickly, muttering a hoarse " God bless you," which somehow or another did not offend me.

" You had better come with us," said the fat lady. " I'm sure it's the most awful place I ever saw in my life."

" Well, you asked to see the worst kind of suffering ! " said the nurse.

" I know, my dear. I did. But I had no idea people lived in such hideous and murderous places. I thought there was a law for pulling down slums. What on earth can the Government be about ?—it's positively criminal to allow such places to stand."

We entered this dark, evil-smelling alley, which

was like a passage to mews. It was not easy to walk on the cobbles, which were very uneven and slippery with grease. The houses were two-story high, and stretching my arms across I could quite comfortably reach from side to side of the burrow. Most of the windows were broken ; in some cases the frames were removed altogether. There was scarcely a whole door, and one could see that no paint had been used anywhere for at least twenty years. In truth, it was the most dark, miserable, and forbidding place I ever saw in my life. And the reek was suffocating.

For a long time the lady refused to enter the house to which the nurse led us after inquiring its whereabouts of a slattern in the alley. I do not think she would ever have gone in but for her fear of the inhuman creatures who came swarming out of every broken and greasy doorway to gape at us. She rather retreated from this filthy and ragged crowd in the alley than entered the house.

We went up a narrow and vibrating staircase without banisters to the floor above. In the room at the back, so dark that it was some time before we could discern its contents, we found a nurse tending a woman who had just given birth to a child.

If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget that room. The nurse had scrubbed it and disinfected it,

but even thus cleansed it was appalling in its savage horror. It was like the lair of some hideous animal. In a corner by the smashed window the woman who had just produced a human being lay on a couple of sacks, groaning and mumbling. The baby lay on the floor wrapped in a roll of flannel. On the opposite side of the room was a group of five little children all but naked, and the eldest of them was nursing a baby ten months old. The faces of these children were caked with dirt, their hair was matted, their bones were showing through the skin. Three of these unfortunate little creatures had their mouths buried in sores.

“ Oh, my God, my dear, dear God ! ” exclaimed the fat lady, almost hysterically, as she realised the scene. She ran to the mother and knelt beside the nurse. “ Oh, send for some clothes, send for a bed ; oh, oh, oh ! don’t let her lie like that ! I can’t bear it. I can’t bear it ! Don’t let a minute go by. Send someone at once. A bed, a bed ; she must have a bed. Look, she’s nearly naked. And the poor little baby ! Is there no fire ?—not even a fireplace ! Oh, my God, my God, was there ever such wickedness ! ”

It was with difficulty the two nurses induced her to be quiet, and even then she could not be stopped from such a flow of tears as quite unmanned me.

I took her hand, and begged her not to cry. I pointed to the children and implored her to take charge of them—hoping that this would distract her grief. But she cried out that it was no use, no use. She said it was like this everywhere—thousands, thousands, millions of children just like these. What could one person do? Why did God allow it? What was the Government about? And so on, till the nurses had to speak sharply to her.

At last she became really useful and practical. She sent one of the children for a neighbour, and gave orders for a mattress and blankets to be brought at once. She then made arrangements for the children to be taken to some public baths, to be supplied with clothes, and then to be sent to the Maternity House in a cab. She undertook to remove all these children to the country. Finally she despatched a neighbour to a baker, and when the tradesman arrived she gave him orders to supply the whole alley with all the bread it needed for a week.

She told me that she intended to buy that alley; to pull down the houses, and erect a single hotel where families could live in decency and get all their meals at cost price. “As for this poor dear little baby,” she concluded, “I shall certainly adopt it. I feel that I owe everything to the poor

mite. It was not until I saw it that my heart gave itself to God. I will never, never, never think of myself again. I am converted. I am born again. I will think of other people, I will work for them, toil for them, love them. And it's all owing to this sweet little baby. Oh, look at the poor dear little creature ! God sent it into the world to break my heart and save my soul."

She took off the feather boa and the jacket she was wearing, and kneeling down on the floor beside the baby, began to cover it with these things.

Then she turned to the mother, and said : " Don't groan, poor soul, don't groan. Have a little patience, and as soon as ever the doctor will let me I'll carry you to Wimbledon. You shall lie on a couch in the garden, and we'll nurse you to health and strength, and you shall never live in a slum any more."

There was no longer any need for me to stay as protector, and taking leave of this good soul and the two nurses I departed for the outer world.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TWO HOOLIGANS

THE aspect of the dark court as I made my exit was remarkable. The dishevelled and slatternly women were no longer repulsive ; their faces had a light of happiness which chased away the brutality of their features ; some of them, indeed, seemed to me as handsome as Roman matrons. Instead of standing in their doorways gloomy and forbidding, they now occupied the centre of the narrow street, filling it with animation and contagious happiness. The children were laughing and speaking to each other with excitement. The very houses appeared less dreadful.

I made my way through this crowd of the underworld with no little difficulty. My hands were seized. I was blessed a dozen times. I was asked a hundred questions. Every one of those women knew that something had happened which broke up the monotony of their destitution and refreshed the sullen atmosphere of their lives with the breath

of hope. The response of their souls was extraordinary.

In what direction I was walking and for what purpose, I had no idea. It was as though some invisible power directed me. I walked through the most sorrowful streets in London, crossed main roads, penetrated courts and alleys, followed canals as ugly and pestiferous as anything in Venice, entered tiny squares formed of factories and tenements, and passed through long dark, narrow streets composed almost entirely of public-houses, lodgings, and rag-and-bone shops.

My mind was entirely occupied with the sights I saw. I did not think of the miracle. Although aware subconsciously of the same strange elation, the same deep sense of pervasive happiness which had come to me at dawn, I walked for an hour through the streets of East London thinking solely of the spectacle presented to my observation. I saw people who made me shudder. I saw streets that filled me with disgust. I saw children whose misery and deprivation startled and frightened and wounded me. Again and again I exclaimed to myself, "How have these things come to be? How is it that men have allowed this misery and wretchedness to come into being? Why is it that they allow such things to exist?"

And I felt the immense folly of expecting virtue to exist in such an environment, even the most primitive virtue of savages. I acknowledged to myself that if I had been born in such streets, if I had been subjected to such an atmosphere, I should have been not merely a brute, but an anarchist. Even as I walked there, conscious always of happiness and elation, my mind clamoured for violence—for some action that would blow these filthy sties into ruin and sweep their wretched inhabitants into the mercy of eternity. I had never known before the uttermost depths of the abyss.

My observation was suddenly attracted by two young hooligans walking ahead of me with guilty caution and with purposeful haste. They glanced back at me apprehensively, looked up courts and side streets as they hurried forward, and whispered together in a confidence that was obviously criminal. Struck by their behaviour, I gradually lost interest in my surroundings and concentrated all my attention on these two men.

Presently I saw that they were evidently dogging the footsteps of an old man carrying a bag in front of them. When they were within thirty yards of this shuffling figure, they walked more slowly and assumed an air of loafing idleness. They continually stopped, as though in two minds as to whether they

should let me go past them. My presence was plainly a vexation. They even attempted to intimidate me by ferocious glances.

I was near enough now to study them. Both were of the same height, much below the average, but the build and faces were entirely different. One man was thickset, heavy-shouldered, and rather bow-legged ; the other was light-limbed, bony, and thin. The face of the thickset man was fat and puffy, of a dough-like complexion, with full lips, small eyes, a short snub nose, and ears that projected from the head. The other man was grey-faced, with cavernous cheeks, a long, thin, cunning mouth, a lean pinched aquiline nose, and eyes that were large and energetic in their cruelty. It struck me as a frightful fact that civilisation produces creatures of their evil kind by hundreds of thousands.

They soon perceived that I was definitely following them, and after a whispered conversation just ahead of me, they suddenly wheeled round and stood straight in my path. I did not move to get out of their way.

“Take a tip from me, guvnor,” said one, “and get out of this part quick ; it’s not safe for the likes of you.”

“There’s fellows about here,” said the other, “who’d think nothing of murdering a gentle-

man for what he might chance to have about him."

"Take this turning to your left," said the other, "and you'll come into a decent street in less than ten minutes."

I said to them, "But what about the old man in front?"

"What old man?" they demanded, almost together, turning round to look in a clumsily feigned surprise. Then one of them laughed. "Why, he means poor old Daddy Green," said one; "poor old Daddy Green, the Scripture Reader!"

"What about him?" demanded the other.

I looked this man in the face—it was the thickset pasty-faced one—and said to him, with the earnestness of a schoolmaster struggling to make a stupid boy understand a simple fact: "God exists. There is a heaven and there is a hell. The good go into heaven. The bad go into hell. God waits to give eternal happiness to those who choose goodness and reject badness. He does not send people to hell. People go there of their own choice. Murderers go to hell. Thieves go to hell. They go there because they deliberately reject good. All cruel and cowardly and brutal souls go to hell."

He stared at me with a torpid perplexity, and said nothing. The other man, however, manifesting

great impatience, said quickly : " What are you getting at with your heaven and hell ? Do you think we aren't converted ? Why, we go to the Mission in Ditch Lane twice a week ! I was converted six months ago, and Bill has been a Christian more than two years."

" Certainly I have," said Bill.

" Well, then," I answered, " we'll walk together. I shall be safe with you. And we three will overtake that old man and have a talk with him."

" You'd better go back, guvnor," said Bill. " Take my word for it, it isn't safe for you up here."

" What ! " I exclaimed, " not safe for me with two Christians ? "

The thin man came suddenly quite close to me, and said, " Look here, if you don't go back I'll give you a punch in the nose." He used savage language to make the threat more terrible.

I looked at him, and said : " Don't hit me, for your own sake. I shan't strike you back. I shall do nothing to punish you. But don't hit me for your own sake. Every cruel blow is punished. You will suffer terribly."

He clenched his fist and raised it to the level of my face. " You see that fist," he said viciously. Then he pressed it against my mouth. " As sure as God made you," he said, between his teeth, " I'll

smash your face for you if you don't go back. Now, will you go, or will you take it ? ”

As he spoke an almost irresistible impulse to knock him down visited my mind. I felt neither fear nor anxiety. The uppermost feeling in my mind was one of loathing and contempt. I never so much wanted to inflict pain.

“ Wait a bit,” said the other man. “ Look here, guvnor,” he continued, pushing his companion on one side, “ you give us a couple of sovereigns and we'll go back the way we came. How's that for fair ? ”

I said to him : “ My money is for the poor and suffering. For you two unhappy souls, going straight to the everlasting misery of hell, I have nothing but warnings and entreaties. Why ! ” I exclaimed, with sudden energy which startled them, “ don't you see for yourselves that you are defying the great eternal God Who made you ? Don't you see that now at this very moment there is murder in your souls ? What can happen to you, what can possibly happen to you, after death ? Murderers go to hell. Think, *think*, what that means ! When you die your souls will be a million times more miserable and wretched than anything on this earth. You will be everlastingly—for ever and ever, for ever and ever—unhappy. Dare you face such a risk ? Have

you thought it out ? You know what it is to be unhappy now. But you have hope—you hope for money, for drink, for success in your crimes. But in hell you will be unhappy for ever, and hopelessly unhappy. Hopelessly unhappy ! Unhappy for ever and ever, and without hope of anything to lift the crushing load of your unhappiness. Why do you choose, of your own free will, such a hideous destiny ? Why do you deliberately choose it ? ”

They were evidently struck by these words. The thickset man never took his eyes from my face, and when I finished he continued to stare at me in the same manner of dull struggling interest. Even the more active-minded, more remorseless man was struck by what I said. He put his hands in his pockets, glanced about him with uncertainty, and then said to his mate, “ Come on, Bill, I’m going to get out of this.”

But the other said : “ Look here, guvnor, what’s a man like me to do ? I must live, mustn’t I ? I’ve got to have food and drink, haven’t I ? Well, what about it ? There’s no work here for me. I can’t earn nothing. So what am I to do ? A man must live, mustn’t he ? ”

The other man, who had moved rather impatiently away, came back swiftly and fiercely, and said to me, with a torrent of bad language : “ Your God don’t

provide meat and drink for us, and don't do nothing to show that He cares a —— for us. Why should we care for Him? Let Him do what He likes. Do you think I'm afraid of Him? I fear neither God nor Devil. If I saw God down here, do you know how I'd serve Him? Like this!"

He hit me a hard and sudden blow between the eyes.

For a moment or two I was more or less stunned, and reeled back against a wall. When I recovered myself, I saw that the men had gone. A woman standing in a doorway on the opposite side of the road was looking at me. She said, "They went up there," nodding in the direction which the old man had been following. Then she said, "They're terrible bad men, those two; you'd better leave them alone."

I thanked her for this advice, but said I was not afraid of them, and continued my way.

The road presently curved away to the left, and ran beside a narrow canal with dreadful houses on either side of it. The dirty water was littered with refuse. The dark houses seemed so rotten and mildewed that one expected them every moment to fall into ruin. At a few of the doorways shabby men were standing in groups, and from some of the upper windows women barely dressed and with their hair

hanging about their unwashed faces, were leaning with a lugubrious interest in the world below.

My presence in this frightful place created excitement. I was aware of angry looks and mocking remarks as I walked forward. Even the ragged children shouted after me. One or two boys got in front of me and made offensive gestures.

For a few minutes, passing through this evil neighbourhood, I was really overwhelmed by despair. I felt that human life had got itself tangled into inextricable misery. I felt that neither religion nor politics could save humanity from the confusion of old neglect.

My happiness came back to me as I left the canal behind me, and turned into a lane which ran between the high walls of a railway embankment and a warehouse. A cool breeze blew down this forsaken lane, and the absence of depressed humanity made it almost cheerful.

At a curve in this alley, I came with startling suddenness on the crime I had anticipated. The old man, white as chalk, with a trickle of scarlet blood on his forehead, lay against the wall of the embankment. His eyes were raised to heaven. His hands were clasped. He kept crying out in a weak voice, "Think of your souls. Save your souls. God forgive them. Christ forgive them. O God, forgive

them ! ” And one of the men was searching the bag he had been carrying, and the other was feeling in his clothes.

Just as I came up, the old man seized the arms of the man who was rifling his pockets, and cried out almost loudly : “ My death is nothing to me. I am glad to go. But think of your soul. For Christ’s sake, think of your soul. Repent while there is time. I did not resist you. I do not resist you now. I make no cry for help. But with my dying breath I pray God to forgive you. I beseech you to repent. Save your soul. Save your soul.”

I sprang forward, and the two men got up and faced me. The one with the bag waited till I was within six paces of him, and then hurled the bag full in my face, so that I stumbled and was blinded by the blow. When I righted myself they were out of sight.

I devoted myself to the old man. While I was bending over him a policeman’s whistle was blown in the distance, and after a few minutes two constables made their appearance, running towards us. It appeared that the hooligans in running away had rushed straight into the arms of a policeman, that he had tried to hold them, suspecting something wrong, and had been cut down by their belts. They had escaped, and the whistle of the wounded

policeman had brought the other two constables upon the scene.

The old man, it turned out, was a rent-collector and a speculator on his own account in slum property. For some years he had been known as a miser, but just lately he had created excitement in the neighbourhood by manifesting a real interest in the souls of the people. He had given away money ; he had set up one or two lodging-houses for men and women ; and he had taken an active share in the work of a Wesleyan Mission.

I gave an account of the occurrence to the police inspector at the station, and paid a visit to the hospital where the poor old man had been carried. As I was leaving, the nurse who had conducted me to the ward—a singularly effective and efficient person—said to me : “It’s a strange thing that such a dreadful crime should be committed on a day when everything seems to be changing for the better.”

“Is it changing for the better ?” I inquired, turning to look at her.

“Oh, the most extraordinary things are happening,” she continued eagerly. “It is not only that we have had hundreds of visitors offering all kinds of help and assistance, but the employers in the neighbourhood are really going to do things for the

people. One of the factories took a vote first thing this morning as to whether the workers would go into the country if they moved their premises and built cottages with gardens. Two other large employers just round the corner have announced a rise in wages. Several of the landlords, so they say, are making arrangements for pulling down their property and building decent houses. The whole thing is bewildering and amazing. Of course, it's only what people ought to do, but it's so strange that it should happen so suddenly. And you'd be surprised at the change in the wards. The patients seem to be interested in religion, and are talking together about the spiritual life. One of the old men in my ward said this morning that if all who believe in Christianity lived as if they knew it to be true, there'd be no misery in the world and no need for politics ; and do you know that when he said that, I felt it to be so perfectly true that I could not help starting a hymn, and we all sang it together, although it's against the rules ! But don't you think it would be almost millennium if every single person who professes Christianity really lived his whole life as if he believed it were true ? ”

She spoke these last words without any particular emphasis, but as she uttered them they struck me suddenly as an inspiration.

I looked into her capable kind face that was bright with humanity and motherliness and cheerful happiness. "Perhaps that is what is happening now," I said to her ; "perhaps every single person in London who professes Christianity is living to-day as if he believed it to be true."

"Oh, no !" she smiled, giving me her hand. "If that were so, it would be the millennium !"

CHAPTER XIV

THE OPEN HEAVENS

WHEN I came out from the hospital it was past two o'clock. The first thing to catch my eye in the street was a newspaper placard, which asked the question—"What's Up With The World?" The boy who carried it was running along the gutter, crying out as he went in a hoarse voice, mechanically, monotonously, and miserably, "Happy times! Happy times!"

The street was crowded with people. They stood about in groups, laughing and talking. Here and there a man was telling something he had heard, or reading aloud from a newspaper. Women, carrying babies in their arms, walked quickly along the pavements speaking together with the excitement of something rare and wonderful in gossip. I noticed that the public-houses were packed and noisy.

I wondered what the newspapers had to say about this miracle, and bought a copy of the *Star* at the

next corner. As I walked I opened it and glanced at the head-lines. Readers were informed that the first Spring weather had quickened the natural philanthropy of the human heart, and that everywhere society was seeking to establish a better condition of things. A long account followed of what was being done. The invasion of the East by the West in motor-cars and carriages was described rather humorously and lightly under the title "A New Craze." More serious attention was given to the activity manifested by charitable agencies. Then, very hastily, as if the news had only just come through, came the announcement of wages voluntarily raised by several of the largest firms in London. I was folding up the paper when the space reserved for Stop-press Telegrams caught my eye. A small paragraph was set out in leaded type in the centre of this space, with the heading, "Is It Millennium?" I read below that news had just been received of similar activity in philanthropy from Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and Bristol.

I asked myself, "How will they explain it?" Then the question occurred to my mind, "*Am I the only man who knows?*"

This startling question was followed by the first definite movement in my mind towards contempla-

tion of my spiritual position. I shrank at first from the idea, but I could not be rid of it. In some mysterious way I had been warned. In some miraculous manner I knew why this thing was happening. Heaven had chosen me for illumination. To me, and probably to me alone, the angels had whispered a secret of God. I was sensible for a moment of appalling isolation.

For a moment I shuddered and shivered with a deadly cold. I was isolated. I was different. I longed to recover my common humanity. I hated to be bereft of the general ignorance. I felt myself, in the atmosphere of the spiritual world, to be an alien without kinsman or companion. This isolation was intolerable.

But was I really the only man who knew? I sprang towards the hope that others infinitely more worthy must have been warned. To escape from my feeling of isolation I hastened my paces and got into the first cab I could find. I told the man to drive westwards, thinking that I would call upon one of my acquaintances, a certain clergyman famous alike for his scholarly mysticism and his ascetic charitable life. As the cab proceeded through the City I remembered that I was to dine that evening with the Bishop of Brompton. I wondered if he would tell me that he knew. I wondered if

any of the other guests would tell us that they knew.

The cab reached the Embankment before I recalled the fact of that afternoon's debate in the House of Commons. A member of the Opposition was to move a vote of censure. All the violent, disorderly, and most dangerous efforts of the Opposition to force a dissolution had failed, and to-day there was to be an orthodox but remorseless attack upon the Government's central position. The mover of the vote of censure, I had been told, intended to whip the Ministry into such a passion that the day might very well culminate in actual disorder.

I leaned from the window-space of my cab and told the man to drive me to the House of Commons. . . .

One of my friends took me into the Members' Lobby, which was thronged with a cheerful company and which echoed loudly with the buzz of conversation. I began to feel for the first time that day the cravings of hunger. We made our way through the dense crowd to one of the refreshment-bars, and while I ate and drank my friend spoke to me about the strange events of the day.

"You know how it has happened, I suppose?" he asked, smiling disdainfully. My friend was a

Liberal. We had been speaking of the wave of philanthropy.

“Tell me?” I asked.

“It’s all a part of the stratagem which has worked for this vote of censure. Society has been secretly preparing for a sudden demonstration of love and charity. Oh, most clever! Democracy, carried off its feet by such amazing friendliness and goodwill, is to rise up at the call of the Opposition and fling out of office a Ministry whose one occupation and purpose, of course, is to set class against class. The secret has been wonderfully well kept. I heard nothing of it till noon to-day, and none of our men, so far as I can ascertain, had the least idea of such a *coup de main*. But I don’t think it will be very successful. Of course, we shall be told that we are the sowers of discord, and that but for us capital and labour would pull cheerfully in double harness. Oh, yes, the Tories will pitch it pretty strong. But democracy is not likely to be dazzled by this gigantic pantomime of generosity. The thing is too vulgarly flamboyant.”

Another member came up to us. “Have you heard the latest?” he asked. “All the Welsh collieries are going to adopt Co-partnership! Williams has just told me. It’s a tremendous move. No one knew anything about it. No one had seriously

suggested it. But, by Jove, this morning one of the owners, a religious enthusiast, went calling on other proprietors, put the idea before them, got a majority on his side, and a meeting to discuss it is to take place next week. Williams says it will revolutionise the industry."

Someone who had been listening to this statement, a Conservative, said to my friend: "It doesn't really want an Act of Parliament to set things right, does it? Just a little ordinary common sense and a little ordinary kindness."

My friend laughed. "Oh, it's tremendously clever," he said cheerfully. "I applaud the scheme heartily."

"What do you mean?" asked the Conservative, puzzled. "I don't understand. What is the scheme you applaud?"

The other member said to my friend, "You're quite wrong. I don't believe the thing is put up at all."

The Conservative said, "Put up! What on earth do you mean?"

My friend laughed again and moved away. "We shall hear all about it in the House. But it's clever, really clever!"

The other man said something quickly and confidentially to the Conservative. I was just in time

to catch a flash of genuine incredulity on the face of the latter, and to hear his exclamation, "How preposterous!"

As we walked across the Lobby my friend said to me: "Any fool could see through it. And there's no other explanation. Besides, the thing has been specially reserved for to-day. Love in the streets and fury in the House! The papers to-morrow will declare that we alone are the one obstacle in the way of Millennium. You'll hear a speech in a few moments that will freeze your blood with horror! . . ."

When I took my seat the House was filling up. The galleries behind me were full. The Peers were not present in such force as I had expected. I discovered afterwards that most of the absentees were in conference with their agents or with the chief charitable agencies of London, concerning social betterment. Among my neighbours were the French and American Ambassadors, Prince Koltovsky, Aubrey Trenchard, and Sir Edgar Wilkinson. Everyone about me seemed to be expecting an amusing rather than a great or historic scene.

There was evidently much more excitement on the Conservative benches than on the opposite side of the House. The Liberals sat rather silently and squarely. The Conservatives were leaning forward

and leaning back, standing up and moving here and there, talking, laughing, smiling, with the confident anticipation of a great victory. I noticed, however, that among the group who had become notorious for the violence of their tactics, a leading man sat very silent, and very white, and very still.

At the conclusion of questions there was a great ovation for the mover of the vote, who came into the House slowly and nervously from behind the Speaker's chair, followed by four of his colleagues, talking together with some excitement. I saw one of these colleagues lean back from the front bench and speak to a man behind him, who visibly started. Then another of the front-bench men went down the House and spoke to the group of violent young Tories. Something had evidently occurred. An extraordinary hush fell upon the Chamber. And in this hush one could see the crowded Conservatives whispering together with amazement and stupefaction. A certain alertness seemed to manifest itself among the watchful Liberals, and some of the Labour men began to laugh and talk rather loudly.

As long as I live I shall never forget the speech of the mover of the vote. I must confess that until that day I had entirely misjudged him. It had seemed to me, in the first place, that he was

a very commonplace example of the British plebeian—a man who had absorbed knowledge without discretion, who had acquired culture without charm, who had climbed the ladder of fortune without mounting to the heights of life. I detested the coarseness of his invective. I hated the violence to which he so readily lent his countenance. I thought of him only as a demagogue who had risen by the force of vulgar audacity and butcher-like brutality to a leadership of most painful political mediocrity. It had been one of the chief distresses of my mind that such a man in such a perilous condition of society should occupy a leading place in a party supposed to represent the upper classes of the community. I had often asked myself what would have been the feelings of Mr. Gladstone facing such an adversary, and the feelings of Disraeli acknowledging such a henchman.

But almost from the first sentence of his speech that afternoon I realised my misjudgment. The man hitherto had misrepresented himself. He did not budge an inch from his devotion to the principles of his party, he alluded with the most convincing sincerity, almost with a religious enthusiasm, to the Imperial advantages of Tariff Reform, and he condemned with unequivocating earnestness both the Home Rule Bill and the Bill for Welsh Dis-

establishment. But who that heard that speech can ever forget the lofty tone of its most winning and persuasive patriotism? Who that has read that speech can fail to be touched by the largeness of its charity and the earnestness of its humanity? He spoke for over an hour. For over an hour, without one trace of bitterness in his voice, without one harsh word, without one vulgar phrase, without one gesture of anger or scorn, he spoke for the safety and honour of the King's dominions and for the welfare of humanity. It was not merely the speech of a great statesman, it was the utterance of a sincere Christian.

Instead of an attack upon the Government, this speech came really to an offer of collaboration, a proposal for alliance. He said that the condition of society was too serious for party conflict. He disclaimed the least desire to make political profit out of the world's unrest. He declared that his party was willing to co-operate with the Government—and to remain for ever in the humble position of helpful friendly critics—in any work that would save civilisation from revolution. When he spoke of life in its ultimate analysis as a spiritual experience his voice shook, and for some moments he was on the point of breaking down. It was only by a great effort that he regained self-mastery and

proceeded with his argument. I remember the strange tense feeling of the atmosphere as he said : " Let us forget self-interest and look at the life of this great country, not as gamblers confronting each other across a gaming-table, not as vultures wheeling over the body of a dying lion, but as doctors met together in consultation, as bishops called by a High Power to be the faithful shepherds of a not ignoble flock. How can we help England ? What can we do to render the life of England glorious and beneficent ? Let us ask ourselves those questions, mindful of our tremendous responsibility, and we shall surely find that our discussions will lose the bitterness and the unprofitable contention which for too long have characterised party strife, and that our Acts of Parliament will become no mere blundering strokes of party tactics, but weighed and certain blessings for the nation we are here to serve."

One felt as he was speaking that now for the first time in modern history the House of Commons represented the soul and conscience of England. The cheers that greeted him were general. There was no irony, but a genuine gratitude, in the cheers of the Labour Party. He spoke about the shame and reproach of slums, he spoke of the awful sin of permitting children to live for one hour in sur-

roundings so deadly to virtue that they might have had Satan for their architect, and he spoke of the abominable condition which forced honest men temporarily driven out of work to seek the grudging shelter of our disgraceful workhouses. And when he said, "Surely if we seriously address ourselves to setting right these inhumanities, these barbarisms, these immoralities so shameful to our religion and so costly to our peace, surely we shall not fail to do something for which posterity will thank us," when he said this, Liberals, Labour men, and Irishmen rose to their feet and cheered. And even when he exclaimed, "Ah, but you prefer to meddle with the Constitution and to harass the Church!" the tone was so genuine and so reproachful—without the smallest trace of snarl or vehemence—that there was no answering shout from the Government benches.

Indeed, I verily believe that every single man in the House of Commons at that moment felt how utterly unimportant and insignificant were the Government's chief measures in comparison with the great human reforms for which this democratic and plebeian lieutenant of Toryism had made so moving and so earnest an appeal. He lifted the House above the dust of party controversy. One seemed to see as he was speaking the vast far-

spreading slums of our industrial cities, the destitution of their children, the depravity of their inhabitations, the huge black sullen army of the joyless workers ; one seemed to be aware of human unhappiness, human ill-health, human degradation, and human waste. In comparison with these most shocking and most perilous things, the national demand of Ireland and of Wales seemed quite trivial and commonplace. Almost every man in the House of Commons was moved that day to a patriotism worthy of spiritual beings.

Aubrey Trenchard said to me at the conclusion of this wonderful speech, " He has erased the word Opposition from our political dictionary."

The French Ambassador whispered in my ear, " There will be a Tariff pretty soon ! "

After the Prime Minister had made his brief and cordial reply to this overture of the Conservative Party I went with Aubrey Trenchard to the Lobby.

" What do you think this all means ? " I asked him.

" It means, my dear fellow," he replied, " that people are coming to their senses. By a happy chance several important people have come to their senses at the same time. Hence, Millennium appears on the horizon."

" But this extraordinary speech ? "

“Why is it extraordinary? I know a dozen men who have been making speeches like that for fifteen or twenty years. Isn't it what we all feel? —isn't it what we all know to be true? Take the term *Opposition*: could anything be more childish? *The duty of the Opposition is to oppose*. How pitiful! And now one of the leaders of the Conservative Party has had the wit to realise the danger of this monstrous doctrine, and we are all surprised. Of course, surprise is natural. One does not expect truth in politicians. But, after all, nothing has been said to-day that you and I have not preached in the serener and more honest atmosphere of literature for years and years.”

“So you think it is only a coincidence—this speech synchronising with all the sudden philanthropy outside?”

“What else can it be?” he demanded.

“You have no faith in miracles?”

“How can it be a miracle?”

“How can it be anything else?” I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. “It seems to me really quite simple,” he said. “For ten or twelve years hundreds of men have taught that Co-partnership is the one way out of our industrial confusion. Well, a few firms have apparently come to the conclusion to give the system a trial. They have

been thinking it over for years. Their decision is taken on the same day. Probably they had all discussed the matter together, and had agreed to act together. Then you have the visits of several rich people to the East End. Well, hundreds of people have been doing that for at least twenty years. Every day new people have been going to see what they could do for the poor. It happens that to-day a great many have gone."

I told him what I had seen for myself.

He was surprised and interested.

"Is it really so general as that?"

I assured him that it was a veritable revolution.

For a moment he did not reply. Then with a smile he said to me: "We know very little about the sun. I believe with the ancients that sun and moon can do almost anything. Our minds are the instruments of the sun's vibrations. He shines, and we are happy. He hides himself, and we are dull. He gets above us, beats straight down upon us, and we go mad. I noticed to-day that his rays were of a singularly genial nature."

My friend the Liberal came up to us and carried me away to the smoking-room. We found a quiet corner, and when he had lighted a cigarette he asked me if I saw through "the Tory dodge."

"Do you mean to tell me," I asked him, "that that speech was not genuine?"

He smiled as he turned to look at me. "Genuine!" he exclaimed. "You don't really think that?"

I was on the point of telling him what I knew when something checked me—perhaps only what we call "second thoughts," perhaps an invisible agency. Whatever it was, I felt that my secret was sacred, I shrank from profaning it.

My friend said to me: "The Tories have discovered that violence does not pay. They are making an effort to capture democracy by kindness. I admit the speech took me by surprise. I admit that it sounded genuine. But it is perfectly evident that both speech and all this orgy of philanthropy outside are part of the same clever stratagem. The Tories have got the mania that ruined Ireland—the mania for secret societies. They have been for the last five years a body of secret societies. They plotted Tariff Reform. They plotted Arthur Balfour's expulsion. They plotted Ulster Rebellion. And now they are plotting to capture democracy. Everything they do is underhand, secret, startling, and full of surprise. They are Fenians from Wardour Street."

The smoking-room began to fill. Men were talking excitedly. I noticed that the two parties

did not mix together so freely as usual. The Tories grouped themselves together and were evidently in dead earnest. The Liberals laughed and chatted with the greatest good-humour. A couple of Labour men close to our lounge were writing out telegrams and comparing them.

Three Liberals came and joined us. Two of them believed that the speech was genuine. The third shared the view of my friend. The discussion was animated.

One of the two men who believed in the genuineness of the Tory overture, a young and very able man supposed to be interested in Christian Socialism, asked me for a casting vote in the controversy. "We are two and two," he said, "you shall decide."

"I believe," was my reply, "that no more genuine speech has ever been made in the House of Commons."

"But why? What makes you think so?" demanded my friend impatiently.

"Because," I answered, "the speech was common sense."

The young man who had appealed to me turned excitedly to my friend and said: "That's the true answer. The speech expressed common sense. Why must you always be looking for plots and mysteries? The Tories have dabbled in plots to

get us out of office. While they plotted they talked violently. To-day their plots came to an end. Common sense has got hold of them, and in consequence their patriotism, which is perfectly sincere and perfectly honourable, has taken a different course. They don't want to get us out of office. They want the triumph of their principles. I am certain that most of them thoroughly believe, religiously believe, that higher wages secured by Tariff Reform will preserve the self-reliance and the individualism of the Englishman better than all our elaborate schemes of State interference. Rightly or wrongly, they believe that, and . . ."

"Then why in Heaven's name," demanded one of the others, "this surrender to us, this offer to serve humbly in the ranks of their enemies?"

The other answered: "By opposing us they force us faster along our road. Marching with us they will make the pace slower. No! it is not a plot: that is not their purpose. I believe they mean to help us sincerely in our reforms, and I think our reforms will be all the more wise and thorough for their help."

"My dear fellow," said one of the others, "I just heard Lord ——" (he named a notorious newspaper proprietor) "say to a Lobby correspondent as he came down from the peers' gallery, 'That ass must

go.' You may be quite right. The speech may have been genuine. But it is only the genuineness of one man. The party will kick him out."

"That," I remarked, "is, of course, the interesting point. Quite evidently the speech took the party by surprise. And"—turning to my friend—"that is one of the reasons why I think it was not in the nature of a plot. But I observed that many of the Tories, I should say at least half of them, cheered the speech towards its conclusion as heartily as any of you. However, the leaders have to reckon with the machine."

At this point a well-known Conservative—an old slow-speaking man accounted something of a bore—came up to our lounge. He shook hands with me quietly and rather solemnly; then turning to the group of Liberals he surveyed them through his gold-rimmed spectacles for a moment without speaking.

One of them said to him. "You are an honest man; tell us now—Is it a plot?"

He stood with his hands on the shoulders of the young Liberal suspected of Christian Socialism. His long white beard touched the dark hair of the young man. "Don't you realise," he asked slowly and quietly, "what has happened?"

No one answered him.

“It means,” he said, “that what religious people call the Spirit of God has entered the House of Commons. We have begun a new epoch. Henceforth the affairs of the nation will not be torn between the wolves of faction. On your side and on my side men who believe in God will work for the prosperity of the country. It is a new era.”

There was a pause, but before I could ask him the question on the tip of my tongue he continued : “You think I am speaking without knowledge. But I have been in the Lobby and I have talked to perhaps fifty members. I will tell you what I found. I found that all those men who believe in religion applauded and rejoiced in that great speech. I found that only those men who notoriously regard religion as a superstition treated it with contempt and anger. I believe that the day of the Christians is at hand. And I believe that only Christianity can save us. On our side we want a deeper sympathy with the poor, and on your side you want a large charity towards the rich. Only Christianity can help us both. You will see. The day may even come when the House of Commons will divide itself in a new way. On one side, the Christians ; on the other, the Materialists. But for the present the Christians on both sides of the House will work together for the salvation of the country. My

friends, the Empire is saved. We are going to work, all of us, for the social and spiritual betterment of our country."

"It is bound to be so," said the young Liberal, "simply because it is so reasonable. We aren't sent here to fight each other. We are sent here to improve things. Evolution in a football scrimmage is absurd."

The venerable Conservative moved away, and taking leave of my friend I followed him.

"Will you tell me?" I asked the old man, "whether you expected any such consummation as that of what you have spoken?"

He slipped his arm through mine. "Yes," he said, "I expected it."

My heart beat faster. "Tell me," I asked; "have you been warned, have you had any vision or dream?"

"No."

"But you expected this strange thing?"

"Yes."

"How, then? Tell me."

He walked on for a few paces in silence, and then, pressing my arm, he said, "Because I have prayed for it." He turned to me, smiling. "Does that surprise you? I don't think it should." He looked away again and drew me to one of the cushioned

arches in the corridor which connects the two Lobbies. "Prayer," he said, as we sat down, "has accomplished marvellous things in the past. Christianity insists upon prayer, and Christianity has been the greatest force in human life. But the prayer of which Christianity speaks is not the perfunctory prayer of the Church nor yet the individual prayer of the Chapel. It is something more than that. It is the pure and earnest aspiration of souls who set the spiritual life above everything else on earth. That is the prayer that moves mountains."

Then he told me that five of his fellow-members, two of them Liberals, had made it a duty to meet together one day every week and pray for the conversion of England.

"It was in no spirit of self-righteousness that we came together for this purpose," he said very solemnly. "God forbid. No; we saw as every honest man must see, that England in her national life is not Christian. However nobly individuals may live, the State does not acknowledge God in the business of the nation. We saw the peril of such frank materialism. We saw the danger of such national apostasy. And so we came together, and we prayed earnestly that the illusion of materialism, with all its problems and contentions, might pass

away from the national soul. That was our prayer. *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.* And I knew, we all knew, that sooner or later our prayer would be answered. The answer has come to-day. Henceforth, mark my words, the old and utterly insane controversy of parties will cease ; a new spirit will pervade our discussions ; we shall address ourselves to all the difficulties of statecraft with the sure purpose of the spiritual life always in our minds. See how it clears the way ! Henceforth every measure will be debated from a single standpoint. We shall ask ourselves, What will this Bill do to make men worthier of their immortal destiny ? It will be judged by that standard, and by that alone."

I said to him as he rose to go : "It is strange that this new spirit in the House of Commons should come on the very day when humanity outside seems to have awakened suddenly to the truth of religion."

"Depend upon it," he said, "men and women have been praying for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

"But you yourself have had no warning that the prayer was to be so miraculously answered ?"

"No."

"It seems to me quite clear that the whole thing is miraculous."

“If you like to put it so,” he answered. “But everything is miraculous. I prefer to say that it is an answer to prayer. I am deeply and profoundly thankful, but I am not surprised. Young says that ardent prayer opens heaven. All those who have ever prayed know that it is so. My friend, the heavens are open. Look well and you will see the angels of God.”

CHAPTER XV

THE CHURCH IN ARMS

THERE was no unusual crowd outside the House of Commons. I was able to walk without difficulty to Parliament Street, where I took a cab and proceeded towards my lodgings.

The conversation with the old Conservative had made a profound impression upon me. Indeed, it had obliterated the more dramatic impression made by the unexpected speech of the debate. It seemed to me, pondering the words of the old man, that something analogous to the old fairy-stories might be traced in the condition of the modern world. Darwin, bending his attention to physical things, and Herbert Spencer, concentrating his thoughts upon a single philosophical thesis, had lost their capacity to appreciate music. A spell, such as the fairy-stories of our childhood tell about, had been thrown upon them. They were not free men. They could not be what they wished to be. Consciously they deplored the loss of a pleasure inexpressibly dear to them.

And in some such manner, so it seemed to me, the modern world had devoted the centre of its attention to machinery. The tremendous interest and dangerous fascination of mechanical contrivance had bewitched it like a spell. A man who studied the moving of visible wheels, the correlation of tangible parts, the amazing and almost human results of this complicated interdependence of manufactured things, became incapable of appreciating the invisible universe. And the rest of the world, hypnotised by this devotion to machinery and dazed by its bewildering achievements, grew gradually dead to spiritual things. The one was real, the other was a dream.

But, as in fairy-stories, this potent and most subtle spell was now apparently broken. All of a sudden, so it appeared to me, men had broken through the mists of hypnosis, and had come face to face with Reality. They perceived in a flash that life was different from anything of which they had conceived. They saw all the roaring machinery of invention as so many trivial toys of childhood. They stood gazing into the depths of everlasting life. They felt their little world expand to the infinite majesty of boundless space. They were conscious of God.

And in this new light how different looked the

world ! What had materialism done to life ? They looked about them, haggard and astonished. Things that had seemed to them natural, things that had escaped their attention, things that they had accepted as part of the order of existence, now stood out bare, gaunt, spectral, and horror-striking. Materialism had blundered. Materialism had brought this confusion to pass. Life, as materialism had made it, was hideous and devilish.

And now, like a swarm of scattered ants, they were running hither and thither to alter things. The idea of God had struck upon their souls. Instantly the world was to be made worthy of eternal glory. No child was to suffer hunger and thirst. No man should profit by the poverty of his fellow-creatures. Life was to be reorganised. The spiritual destiny of humanity was to be the purpose of all thought, all action, and all aspiration. Life was to be rendered beautiful, dignified, and pure. The world was conscience-stricken.

As these thoughts passed through my mind, a sense of fresh exaltation visited my soul. I rejoiced with what an old chronicler once called "the uppermost satisfaction." Almost in an ecstasy of delight, I realised that I was witnessing the new-birth of the world. Humanity was being born again.

I looked through my cab window. The streets

were bright with the setting of the sun. In this gentle radiance men and women were moving slowly and quietly. The haste of ordinary days was nowhere to be seen. People were sauntering, and as they sauntered they smiled and talked pleasantly together. I saw one of my own nephews, a young Guardsman, go up to an ancient beggar-woman and take from her shoulder the sack under which she was painfully bending. I saw men of fashion talking to wretched creatures with sandwich-boards. I noticed several ladies taking ragged children into their carriages and motor-cars.

But there was something new and strange in the aspect of the street, I knew not what, for which this kindness and chivalry of the people on the pavement did not account. I was puzzled to know what it might be. At last the cause made itself apparent. There was a most singular and pleasing courtesy among the drivers of vehicles.

Slight as was this cause, the result was extraordinary. Instead of clamorous and pushing competition, the crowding vehicles glided forward with wonderful quietness, giving way to each other, pausing for people to cross in front of them, and proceeding, nevertheless, with far fewer checks and interruptions than usual. Drivers of vans kept to the kerb's edge, motor-buses drew to one side when

a taxi-cab was passing them, motor-cars slowed down for restive horses. I observed on the faces of drivers and chauffeurs a remarkable absence of that almost brutal concentration which has rendered the transition to petrol so unpleasant and ugly. There was an obvious geniality and good-humour in the faces of these men, such as one was accustomed to see in the faces of old cabmen.

I turned from my study of vehicles to look once more at the people on the pavement. My cab was rounding the corner of Lower Regent Street into Piccadilly. The crowds were denser. Some strange commotion seemed to be taking place. I was startled by the sudden change from the peace and quiet of the streets I had just left. My cab was stopped, and I got out to see what was happening.

When I had paid the cabman, I crossed the road to the north side of Piccadilly, where the crowd was densest and the excitement greatest. I found myself in a pack of people. It was only with the greatest difficulty I could wedge myself into this swarm of human beings, and to move forward was almost impossible. Some people were crying, others were talking excitedly, a few were laughing very brutally. Policemen endeavoured to keep us moving. Mounted policemen were diverting the traffic. Most of the shops were shuttered.

I avoided being turned down a side street, and passed forward into freer space. As I did so, suddenly I saw in front of me, white, luminous, and beautiful, the figure of a spirit Child. It was a Child, one would say, of twelve years of age. And yet I felt instantly, nay I knew, that it was the soul of the babe that I had seen lying dead that morning in the quarryman's cottage. I saw the Child distinctly. He turned and looked at me. For several moments our eyes met. His face and his garments were transfigured, his hair was like spun gold, his eyes were like violets, his lips were smiling very tenderly. It is impossible for me to think that I imagined the figure to be there. I was in no mood of abstraction. On every side I was thronged by an excited crowd. The sense of something happening had completely driven reverie from my mind. No ; I am as certain as I am of anything that in that congestion of humanity the soul of the dead babe was moving like an angel of God.

My eyes were still fixed upon the Child. I was impatient to draw level with him. I was struggling to get clear of people in front of me, when I felt my arm caught, and heard myself called by name. I looked up, and found myself face to face with the Bishop of Brompton.

He was almost breathless. "Come and help us!" he exclaimed. "You are the very man."

As he uttered these words his restless eyes glanced to right and left of him. As he finished, still holding my arm, he plunged suddenly forward, dragging me with him.

A woman, hot-faced and indignant, was endeavouring to force herself through the crowd. There was no mistaking her place in the world.

The Bishop confronted her. "Save your soul!" he whispered passionately in her ear. "You were once an innocent child. A mother nursed you, perhaps she prayed for you. Save your soul." He took one of her hands. "My sister, my sister," he cried; "you are in frightful peril. I can't see you walking to perdition. I must make an effort to save you. You are going to everlasting misery. Turn to Christ—turn to the pitiful Christ." He dragged her away with him to the pavement's edge. A motor-car stopped by him. "Here is a lady," he said, "waiting to take you into her home. She will care for you and love you, because she loves Christ. Open your heart to her. Tell her everything. She will show you the way to peace." The door opened, and inside the motor-car I saw Lady Salvington.

The woman had burst into tears. She covered

her face with her hands and allowed herself to be placed in the motor-car. "Come back when you can," the Bishop said to Lady Salvington, and shut the door.

He put his arm through mine and pushed his way through the crowd. "My dear fellow," he said, "what have we been about all these years? We must have been walking in sleep. Great heavens, thousands of our sisters, *our sisters*, walking on these streets to eternal hell, and we have scarcely moved a finger to save them. We have paid a few people to try to save them! We have endeavoured to provide Parliamentary legislation! And all the time, under our very eyes, thousands and thousands of poor women going straight to hell!"

Two quite young girls, pale and excited, came towards us. They were glancing over their shoulders with apparent terror. Behind them, thrusting towards them and leering at them, came a big brutal-faced man of middle age. The Bishop sprang forward at this fellow and stood in his way.

"What are you about?" he demanded.

The man was taken completely by surprise. He stared and said nothing.

The Bishop said to him: "Do you know what you should be doing? You should be helping to save poor women who are going to hell for want of a little

kindness, for lack of a little love. You are a man. You are answerable to God. Come, turn round, and help us to lift poor perishing souls out of the road to hell."

The man had recovered himself. He endeavoured to push past. "Oh, you get out!" he said savagely.

But the Bishop held him. "I warn you!" he said sternly. "You are doing the devil's work."

"Let go of me," said the man, glowering at the Bishop. He was now white, and trembling with rage.

"Have you no sisters? Had you no mother?" the Bishop demanded. "How would you like to see your sisters walking these streets with no place in the homes of men? How would you like to see your mother here? Man alive, God exists! His wrath will crush you to powder. Save your soul. I warn you. Save your soul."

He let go of the man, and three young men who had been in the crowd surrounding us, followed at the fellow's heels. One of them called back over his shoulder, "We'll look after him, Bishop."

The Bishop said to me: "We're going to sweep the streets of London clean. To-day is the last day of apathy and indifference. To-morrow we wake to a new London. You'll not know it for the same London, I promise you. Think, my dear fellow, of

the madness of the past. We have actually allowed the principal streets of the metropolis, not the back streets, the principal streets of the capital city of the British Empire to be occupied unchallenged by Vice. We have permitted it! The lowest degradation to which a woman can descend, the most unthinkable impurity to which a human soul can come—the actual selling of the body—this has been going on in the chief centre of England's chiefest city. Why, what does it mean? Vice walks shameless and bold in our proudest streets, and in our proudest streets Virtue walks shameful and pained. That's what it means. Think of it! Such a thing doesn't exist in a single village, in scarcely one of our provincial towns, and not at all in any of the cities of Ireland. But it's so in London! Why? Why? Vice with us isn't a matter of dark streets and hidden roads. It isn't something to which people creep guilty and ashamed. No! it's here in the proudest of our streets. These streets belong to it. Music-halls and restaurants exist for it. It isn't safe for young girls to walk here, it's indecent for ladies to be here alone. In the centre of London! Vice has stolen our capital city. And we sit idle. I was going out to dinner to-night! I was to have met you. We should have talked and laughed and jested—good God, we should have

talked and laughed and jested !—and here on these streets thousands of poor girls would have been going to hell unwarned, unfriended ! ”

While he was speaking I saw again and again some weeping Magdalen being guided to a carriage or to a motor-car, by men and by women. Several clergymen were at this work, and several Nonconformist ministers. The streets seemed to be occupied by an army of Christians. It was as though a trumpet had blown from heaven and all true soldiers of Christ had mustered for the salvation of humanity. I was moved more than I can say by that wonderful sight. Ladies of title very well known to me, able and brilliant clergymen with whom I had some acquaintance, numerous men and women representative of all classes, were pleading and sheltering and warning the Magdalens of London.

In most cases these unhappy creatures broke down utterly and surrendered to the loving solicitude of those who sought to help them. Carriages and motor-cars were continually gliding away with some poor creature only too grateful to be saved from misery. But I noticed women who shook off with anger and with passionate indignation the people who sought to save them. I noticed others who were hurrying away to escape from pleading and help. I noticed a few who openly mocked the Christians.

“I’ve got hundreds of men and women in the restaurants,” said the Bishop. “We’ve taken possession of the enemy’s country. To-night we shall fill the music-halls. If there’s anything shameful or disgusting in the programme, it will be hissed off the stage. If there’s any traffic in the lounges it will be stopped. And it’s going to be like this night after night. We’ve slept for years. We’ve suffered the enemy to do what he likes. But now, now we’re awake ! We’re going to fight. We’re a Church in arms. You’ll see now which is the stronger, Righteousness or Iniquity, God or the Devil.”

I drew him aside from the crowd. “There are many people working here to save these women,” I said ; “you can be spared for a few minutes. Come with me to my rooms. I really want to speak to you.”

He put his hands on my arms impulsively and smiled, shaking his head. “No, my dear fellow, no ! We’ve done too much talking already. No man can be spared. You yourself ought to be helping us. If you’ve got rooms close by, use them for saving these poor women. Don’t you see that all the trouble has been caused by this same talking ? We’ve talked ourselves asleep. We’ve talked ourselves out of a living faith. What we should have done, we must do now with all our might, *we*

must act. We must not only show our colours, we must draw our swords. We must not only parade, we must fight. We must act as if we really believed what we profess."

He was moving away, when he came suddenly back to me, very earnest, and very solemn, and very quiet. "How has it come to pass," he said, "that we have allowed this state of things to grow into being? When I ask myself that question I do not feel that I have been asleep; I feel that I have been mad. Think! We have been preaching and praying all these years, we have been meeting and discussing, we have been holding festivals and taking part in ceremonies, while under our very eyes thousands upon thousands of our weakest fellow-creatures—seventy per cent of them the genuine victims of the seducer—have been going steadily and broken-heartedly to hell. Oh, we have had our societies, our paid agents, and our noble sisters standing at street corners, but we ourselves, we, the Church of Christ, what have we been doing? Why have we not been doing all these years what we are doing now? Is it not the obvious thing that we are doing? And I have passed thousands of these poor girls without a word. So have you. So have thousands of good Christians. Think! We have passed souls going straight to hell, knowing

they are going straight to hell, *without one word!* When I think of that I feel we have been mad."

"It is of that I want so much to speak to you," I said. "Can't you really spare me half an hour?"

"No! no!" he cried, "not another minute. Too much talk, too much talk! I have lost opportunities standing here." He moved away, back to the crowded streets. Over his shoulder he called to me, "Warn somebody to-night. Speak at least to one or two. Don't waste a single chance."

I watched him enter the crowds of Piccadilly, and followed him with my eyes till he was out of sight.

While I was standing there a man approached me. "This," said he, "is the *coup de main* of God Himself." He smiled and added with conviction: "It is better than the *coup d'état* of which we once spoke together."

It was the political journalist who had told me I was not the man.

CHAPTER XVI

THE IMPERIALIST THINKS ALOUD

AS we walked away together he said to me, "We shall never again get the Church to arm itself against Welsh Disestablishment! It's armed now against Satan. It will think only of that. There's nothing so obsessing and exciting as fighting the Devil."

"What do you think of it all?" I asked him.

He pushed back his hat, heaved up his shoulders, and replied: "The cause is simple and yet obscure——"

"Oh, you know the cause, then?" I interrupted.

"The cause! Well, isn't it obvious? It seems to me self-evident that we are in for one of those waves of religious feeling which make for revivals. A few years ago there was one in Wales. Before that there was the Booth wave. Before that the Wesley wave. They are common enough. The interesting thing lies in the fact so little recognised by historians and theologians that the materials

for these tremendous movements of religious feeling are always in existence. They were in existence before John Baptist took to the wilderness. They were in existence before Christ came from the wilderness. They were in existence before Piers Plowman sang, before Wyclif preached, before Luther played the revolutionary, before Wesley mounted his horse and rode through the eighteenth century. They are *always* in existence. What is needed is the man. Let some great and earnest man preach the reality of spiritual things and mankind will rise from the calm of torpidity like a great tidal wave, sweeping everything before it. I am always so amused when I hear of clergymen deploring the indifference of mankind to spiritual things. That charge is a boomerang. The flock is indifferent when the shepherd is lacking. One great priest, truly in earnest, can as surely rouse the Church to action as Napoleon could draw the soldiers of France to his standard."

"But," I said, "where is the great man on this occasion?"

"I haven't the least idea, but I am sure he is in existence. We shall hear of him in a few days. We shall find that some one man has been spurring the Bishop of Brompton to invade the London streets. That the same one man has been driving Duchesses

to invade the East End. He is probably a curate in North Kensington, or a colonial secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association. New blood, you may depend upon it, has been pumped into the Church. The Church is awake. Christianity is armed. The Devil is to be got on the run and kept running till the wave subsides."

I let him proceed in this fashion for a few moments and then I asked him if he thought this same one man had inspired the owners of slum properties to visit their rookeries and give orders for their demolition.

"A thing like this is contagious," he answered. "It is one of the infallible elements of all religious revivals that the quickened fire spreads instantly and almost incredibly over an enormous area. I cannot say how it comes about. If it satisfies you, I will admit the thing to be miraculous. But the origin of it all, I am sure, is the religious enthusiasm, the religious earnestness, the religious reality of one man."

I spoke of employers who had suddenly adopted, or had proposed that day to adopt, the principle of Co-partnership.

He replied in the same way. The wave of religious enthusiasm, he said, had spread and flooded into every creek and inlet of our national existence.

"Even," I said—we were near my door in Hertford Street—"into the House of Commons!"

He smiled. "Ah, I fancy that there we have a safe breakwater against all the floods of religious feeling!"

He had put out his hand to say good-bye.

"But do you think that, after the debate to-day?"

He started. "What do you mean?" he asked, almost agape.

"Haven't you heard?"

"Nothing."

"Do you mean to tell me——"

"Please. What has happened?" The man was pale and excited.

"Well, your side came into battle without swords. The spokesman bore an olive branch. The two parties have embraced each other."

"You can't mean that."

"I do, indeed."

"Oh, but it's some fantastic rumour."

"I was there."

"You were there!"

"It was the most striking speech I ever heard in my life. Perhaps the immense surprise, the extraordinary unexpectedness of it, may have had something to do with the effect. But, on my life, I never——"

He took hold of my arm. "Let me come in with you," he said. "Great heavens, I believe the world is mad! Tell me about it. To-day was our chance. As I was listening to the stories about this amazing movement of philanthropy I thought to myself that the gods had prepared the ground for the battle of this afternoon. Nothing could have been more to our advantage. And you tell me there was no onslaught? Not a stroke? Not one single charge? Good heavens, the ground has gone from under me!"

We entered my sitting-room and I rang for tea. The journalist huddled himself up in a big chair, nursing his knees, and begged me to tell him exactly what had happened. His eyes shone brightly. His skin was the colour of a candle.

"I lunched at the Naval and Military," he said. "I met Highton. I wanted to get some real facts about these new guns. After lunch everyone was talking about the sudden revival of slumming as a fashionable craze. Then came news about the Welsh Coal Syndicate and Co-partnership. I rubbed my hands and told them that the battle was ours. I imagined that our fellows in the House of Commons were simply mowing down the Ministry. I coined phrases for my leader to-morrow! I saw the enemy beaten and fleeing. It was our chance,

our chance ! And now you say . . . But tell me. You were there. Tell me about the feeling in the House. What did men say ? ”

While we took tea I gave him an account of the speech, the Premier's reply, and spoke of the gossip I had heard afterwards. I did not tell him about the old Conservative and his faith in prayer, because I considered, first, that it was in the nature of a confidence, and, second, that the journalist would hardly understand it.

He listened intently. He was watching me like a cat. Over his teacup his eyes were fixed upon me. While he was eating he still regarded me with this sharpness of interest. And he never once interrupted me.

When I had finished he sprang up and began pacing the room. As he spoke he drove his fingers through his hair again and again. His voice was low and restrained. His intellect was never out of hand.

“ What does this mean ? ” he said, as one thinking aloud. “ It means ruin. Not temporary ruin. It means everlasting ruin. We shall never get over it. We shall never emerge. Chamberlainism is dead. Imperialism is dead. Tariff Reform is dead. Three hours ago they were on the edge of victory. Now they are driven out of existence. They cannot come

back. Socialism has won. The last obstacle in its path is removed. We have removed it. We have cleared the way. Five years from now England will be a Republic."

He placed his hands behind his back, twisting his fingers together. "It is too late to protest. Our leaders have betrayed us. We are sold to the enemy. Not all the newspapers in England can save us, even if they had the guts to fight. Solemnly and before the eyes of the whole nation we have surrendered to a triumphant enemy. My work is done. I am beaten. England is lost."

I could not help smiling. "You forget," I said——

"I forget nothing!" he cried, lifting his head, and for a moment standing still to survey me. "You mean that he spoke of his devotion to our principles? You think that those principles still exist? I tell you they are dead. A man fights for his principles, dies for his principles. When he kisses the cheek of those who are at enmity with those principles they cease to exist. Henceforth, mark my words, the Conservative Party in this country becomes the spinster-aunt of Liberalism. There will be nothing in the House of Commons but the purring of cats. Socialism will cool its heels at the fire. And the Empire will burn."

He spoke like a man enraged and beaten and captive. It was now a most piteous sight to see the torture of his unconquerable mind.

"I want to ask you a question," I said to him.

He came over to me swiftly and almost violently. "There's no brotherly love in politics," he said bitterly. "It's war, and war only. It must be war. One side is doing what the other side believes to be destructive of the national safety. How can there be an alliance? You must fight, you must fight! Yes, you must fight like the devil. No mercy, no quarter. Arthur Balfour tried rose-water. You can't fight an enemy with perfumes and fans. You've got to hit him. I want war. I want our Party in arms. I want the shout and the charge and the lust of killing. I want victory, victory, by ——! And instead . . ."

"Let me ask you this question," I said.

"Well?" he demanded impatiently.

"Do you believe in God?"

His teeth gritted and the bones of his face stood out clear and rigid. I saw his fists clench themselves at his side. A shadow seemed to pass across his eyes.

"I believe in God, yes," he answered. "I believe in the God of natural law. I believe in *the God Who doesn't interfere.*"

"The God Who expects us to set up the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Yes. The Kingdom of Reason."

"Reason !"

"Yes, the one thing divine about man, lifting him above all the animals, is Reason. God expects us to use our reason. It is the only instinct of the soul. There is no other. Neglect the reason and you become an ape, or a monk, or a Socialist—something insane."

"But you were speaking just now of war ?"

"Well ?"

"Is that rational ?"

"It's just. It's a part of nature's scheme. The strong triumph. The battle is only to the strong. Right without a sword is virtue in the stocks. You've got to fight or be crushed. All the living religions are armed."

"Why not revive the duel ?"

"The duel was a very excellent institution. Gentlemen could live when the duel was in vogue. It kept clowns in their place. There was no Socialism in England when gentlemen wore swords."

"Are you serious ?"

"I'm mad—mad with exasperation and rage !"

"But let us think this thing out. To-morrow

you will write. Consider now the facts about which you will have to speak your mind."

"There is only one. Imperialism is dead. Already I am composing its elegy."

"Would it not be wiser to wait for the doctor's certificate?"

"We have one hope, and one only. A man must be found. Oh, for one great fighting soul! One man who is not afraid. Is there such a man? Can we lay our hands on one man?" He began walking to and fro, biting his lips, muttering names, his eyes fixed upon the carpet. "I must see ——. There may be time. All our papers must cry for war. I'll see —— and ——. I'll try . . ." Suddenly he looked up and came towards me. "The worst of it is," he said quietly and sorrowfully, "the thing is true."

"What do you mean?"

He flung himself into a chair. "Why, of course, the best men on both sides ought to co-operate. We must have social reform. These slums and rookeries must go. They're heathenish, they're infernal. Children must be given a fair chance—every child in the land. And workmen must have security. They must, they must. No man can be at peace whose home is not secured to him, whose bread depends on the demands of a market.

And we must free the land. The Radicals are perfectly right. Landowners have emptied England. These d——d pheasants, this confounded hunting ! We want peasants. We must have peasants. Our strength depends upon the peasantry. And they must have land, and decent cottages, and a living wage. And we must have devolution—devolution all round. The Imperial Parliament must deal with imperial affairs. We must have a local Parliament for England. We must pull England down and build it up afresh. New towns, new cities, new villages. More light, more air, more land for everyone. Yes, we are only at the beginning of things. Modern England has not begun yet. We're only assisting at the obsequies of the old. We're burying feudal England. No, not burying it. We're fighting over the dust and ashes, the bones, the bones, the dirty bones ! What a future before us ! The building up of a modern, scientific, and perfectly efficient State. The creation of a new world ! That's what it is—the creation of a new world. But—Tariff Reform ! We must have it. I wonder, and I wonder ! By George, it has just occurred to me ! ”

He jumped up. “ Is it possible ? If it is, by heavens, I'll fight with them ! ”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Why, the Radicals may do it ! Why not ? ”

A treaty of alliance between us ! We'll agree to help all their social reforms if they introduce Imperial Preference. That's all I care about. I want to see the Empire bound up and four-square against the world. By George, it's a great scheme ! I must go ! I'll see the Leader. Yes, it's a great scheme."

I made no effort to detain him, but happily he turned back at the door.

"You asked me a question just now," he said, "and I answered rather violently. I should like you to know that I believe in God, that I try to serve what I honestly think to be His purpose, that I endeavour to love my fellow-men."

I said to him : "Believe me when I tell you that the strange things of to-day are a miracle. They come from God."

He stared at me. "This religious revival, you mean ? "

"Everything."

"You mean that this turn in politics is all part of the revival ? "

"To-day," I made answer, "some great breath of the Eternal Spirit is moving through our national life. I know that. I am in no doubt about it. And I think I know how it is acting."

He glanced at me amazed.

"Shall I tell you?" I asked.

"Yes," he said curiously and quietly. It was evident that he thought my reason to be affected.

"It is acting, I think, in this manner: It is convincing the souls of all those who believe in God that God is Reality."

He nodded his head.

"Think a moment what it means," I said.

"Yes, I see."

"Are you sure?"

"I think so."

"But do you see," I said approaching him, "that if God is Reality everything becomes different? Think. Is not everything in our life—our national, social, industrial, and religious life—what it is because of the doubt whether God really exists? And if this is so, does not everything become different when the actual Reality of God is established? If you believed absolutely in God—no, if you *knew* absolutely that God existed, would you pass a single harlot in the street without expending all your soul to save her? would you see a man going straight to hell without striving your hardest to turn him about? would you say a word, write a word, or do a single action that did not help mankind to their immortal inheritance? That is what is happening now. Men who thought they

believed now know that they believe. The misery and the havoc and the confusion of the world are caused by the doubt of God's existence. Remove that doubt—God has removed it for us—and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

He said to me, "You are right. Everything turns on that. Everything is what it is because of the doubt."

CHAPTER XVII

ETERNAL UNITY

THE door had closed upon the Imperialist but a few minutes when Dr. Garth, the eminent Congregationalist, was shown into my room.

It had been my pleasure to meet him on three or four occasions during the period of my political negotiations. I had found him a high-minded, clear-headed, and singularly disinterested man. His scholarship delighted me, his restraint and tolerance appealed to me, and I liked him for the pleasantness of his manner, the refinement of his face, and the amiable tones of his voice. I had always remembered him as an excellent, good, well-informed, and sensible man.

I found it now, after the visit of my perturbed and tortured friend the Imperialist, quite refreshing to let my gaze rest upon the peace of this good man's face—upon the serenity of his brow, the abiding tranquillity of his eyes, the gracious calm of his lips. It was refreshing, too, after the tense

and stinging tones of the journalist's voice, to listen to the gentle measured utterance of this steadfast soul.

I greeted him warmly, made him feel himself really welcome, and settled down, as I hoped, to hear his opinion of the day's events.

"You were kind enough," he said, "to consult me some little time ago on the matter of a religious alliance for political purposes. I am afraid I was of no very great service to you. The object you had in view seemed to me at the time entirely impossible. One can effect nothing without faith."

I was surprised to find him speaking so calmly of past history when all the world, as it seemed to me, was seething with the new leaven of a divine revelation.

"And now," he continued, "*I* have come to consult *you*, and about an alliance—an alliance, too, more difficult, one would think, to bring about than the one you had in mind a year or two ago. But I hope to find that you will have faith in it. May I speak about it ? "

"Forgive me," I replied, "but you surprise me by speaking of diplomatic negotiations when apparently something miraculous has occurred which has already transformed humanity."

He smiled and bowed to me in appreciation, and

yet in correction, of my remark. "What I have to propose to you," he said, "is suggested by this miracle of which we are all sensible. My proposition, I like to think, is inspired by the same influence."

"And you are by no means surprised or excited?" I asked, smiling.

He answered my smile and replied: "I have seen so many revivals, I have inquired so thoroughly into the literature of conversion, that I know the danger of being swept forward on a wave of emotion, however genuine and pure. To steady the soul at such moments, to get hold of one's self with both hands, as it were, and to hold one's self fixed and square to the abiding conditions of life, is to serve the lasting interests of religion. And so in the present case. We are aroused by some invisible agency. The bugles of God have blown from the ramparts of heaven and the whole army of Christ is mustering for the victory of His Kingdom. It is most wonderful. It is most splendid and elating. But—to-morrow will come. The sun will not always shine so gloriously. Rain will fall. The east wind will blow. And the knapsack of the daily task will press upon the shoulders. I am thinking of to-morrow. I am thinking how we may carry the spirit of to-day into the long road of to-morrow."

A sense of greyiness crept into the room as he was

speaking. I felt a chill in my flesh, a depression at my heart. After all, I thought, will this thing last, can it last, can it survive the ordeal of daily life ?

I roused myself and said to him : “ Of course, what you say is perfectly true. But my feeling is that this awakening, or this visitation—whatever we like to call it—is something deeper than a revival.”

“ I perfectly agree,” he answered. “ I am delighted, too, that you recognise the miracle. That will help me when I come to my proposal—for I want your enthusiasm ! But I think it will be wise for us to anticipate reaction. There are precedents in spiritual as well as in temporal things. I confidently look for the dying down of this sudden and splendid wave of religious energy. If I was to hear the very Voice of God speaking to us from heaven I should know that the long silence would return. Let us, at any rate, prepare for to-morrow.”

I felt the wisdom of the man’s mind, and begged him to speak of his proposal, assuring him that I would very gladly devote my life to religious work.

“ Ah ! ” he exclaimed, with a charming smile, “ you perceive now the futility of politics and the complete sufficiency of religion ! When you came to me you were a politician, and your proposal was

to harness religion to the chariot of politics. You wanted to use the greater to serve the less. That was why I could not help you. I knew the thing was hopeless."

"Tell me your proposal," I said.

"My proposal," he replied, "is to set on foot negotiations for an alliance of all the churches in the interests for which they exist—the interests of religion. Do not look so despairful! Mark, I am seeking a union of the Churches—not in the interests of faction, but in the interests of religion. It will not be easy. Indeed, it is at the first glance a proposition for the impossible. But I think there is a road to achievement."

"I feel quite chilled, but please go on!"

"How dreadful," he exclaimed, smiling, "how dreadful, isn't it?—that any such proposition should fill people with despair. How we must have blundered in the past! What follies we must have committed! How very far we must have been from the Kingdom of Christ! When the branches of the Vine are in conflict, how shall the world gather grapes?"

"Yet you see a way out now?"

"I think I do," he replied gravely.

"It is a work to which a man might well give his life."

“ Yes, something to live for, something to die for—the patriotism of God ! ”

“ Well, tell me.”

He sat a little forward in his chair, and looking at me with great earnestness spoke as follows :
“ All the many quarrels which divide the churches have their rise in theology, not a single one of them in religion. From the dawn of Christianity down to this present day men have quarrelled, and divided, and fought each other about words. The battlefield of schism is the region of definition. Examine all the historical ruptures, examine the most pitiful of the minor sub-divisions of Protestantism, and you find in no single case that the cause of schism was religion. The cause was always a matter of dogma, a matter of interpretation.

“ Now, I would seize this wonderful moment of religious energy to bind upon men’s brows the common sign of their common faith. I would use it to demonstrate the infinite importance of the religious life, the altogether minor and inferior importance of theological thinking. I believe it is possible while Christians are so vitally awake to service and action to convince them that their definitions and their interpretations are of small importance.

“ And I tell you how I would do that. I would

say to all Christians in this country, Hitherto we have taught that men must think as we think ; let us now for evermore teach that men need only do as we do ; let us shut our manuals of rules, conditions, and rubrics : let us throw into a corner of our empty churches all the painful and self-contradicting text-books of our theologies ; and let us go into the world to save men and to serve them. In a word, I would lift the eyes of men from a printed page and turn them to a sinful and sorrowful world—a world only sinful and sorrowful because it does not acknowledge God.

“ Let me tell you,” he continued, “ what came into my mind this morning. I, too, have been touched by this wave of religious enthusiasm. Early this morning I was reading for I suppose the thousandth time Drummond’s *Greatest Thing in the World*. When I came to the passage concerning Christ’s prefiguration of the Great Judgment—

Be not deceived. The words which all of us shall one Day hear, sound not of theology but of life, not of churches and saints but of the hungry and the poor, not of creeds and doctrines but of shelter and clothing, not of Bibles and prayer-books but of cups of cold water in the name of Christ—

when I read those words, quite suddenly and quite wonderfully, a light shone into my soul, and I became a Christian. What do I mean by that? I mean exactly what I say. Hitherto I have been a Nonconformist, a theologian, a philosopher, an ethical teacher—what you will; but not a Christian. A Christian is one who lives and works to bring the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is not brought by thinking. It is brought by doing the Will of God. I saw suddenly that all my reading and thinking, all my preaching and lecturing, might just as well have been done in the name of Socrates or in the name of Marcus Aurelius. I saw that I must go into the streets and actually save people. I saw that I must minister to the hungry and the poor, that I must be dealing with food and shelter, that I must be carrying cups of cold water. *The words which all of us shall one Day hear, sound not of theology but of life.* I repeated that sentence to confirm my illumination, but it was not necessary. I saw for the first time in my life, quite vividly and almost overwhelmingly, what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is a life of love and devotion.”

He sat back in his chair and for a moment kept silence, gazing before him into the fireplace. Quietly he turned his head and looked at me.

“Christianity,” he said, “is faith in God. Christ came to teach men that. He knew that a man who veritably believes in God is born again. It was for Him the supreme wisdom that men should believe in God. But we have forgotten God all down the centuries. Or, if we have not forgotten Him, we have taken Him for granted. We have asked men to believe in this and in that, we have puzzled them with our conflicting definitions concerning the precise relationship of the Son to the Father, we have exasperated them, and finally exiled them from our churches by insisting on the supreme importance of *our* interpretation of this Scripture and *our* rendering of that particular translation of a translation. And all we had to do was to teach the infinite and sole importance of faith in God. To believe in God—that is to say, to believe in the God of Love revealed to humanity by Christ—is the first necessity of the religious life. And the next, to do His Will as revealed to us by Christ. Those are the essentials. Those are the facts. Nothing else is above them.

“My hope is this, that now, with a great wave of religious enthusiasm, and at a time when men are sick to death of theological futilities, we may unite the Churches in these essentials of Christianity. But listen ! I am not so foolish as to suppose that

any single Church will drop its particular orthodoxy. I am not proposing that there should be one Church and one definition of Christianity. That is where we have blundered in the past. But I see no insuperable difficulty to this great consummation—that all the Churches should proclaim with one voice, in perfect and unequivocating unanimity, that faith in the God revealed by Christ, and service to humanity in the name of Christ, are the foundations and the first essentials of the Christian religion.

“In the past Protestants have attacked Catholics for teaching one thing, Evangelicals have attacked Ritualists for teaching another thing, and so on, and so on. We have all been making a tremendous to-do about things which are not of *supreme* importance. Now, I want to change that by simply concentrating the attention of all the Churches on the first and supreme essentials of Christianity. Let us say to each other, every one of us, *These* are the supreme things. Let us also say, *Nothing else matters*. Do you see what I mean? Let the Ritualist have his candles and vestments: why not? Let the Baptist have his pool for immersion: why not? Let the Roman have his fast days: why not? All I would ask of any man who would call himself a Christian is this: You must believe

in a God of Love, and you must lead a life of love."

He stood up suddenly, and facing away from me for a moment, his hands resting on the mantelpiece, spoke as follows :

"This is the heart of my proposal : That we all agree to recognise the complete liberty of Christians to act as they please in the region of non-essentials. I see now the illuminating wisdom of Christ's instruction, *By their fruits ye shall know them.*" He turned round to me. "Do I make myself clear ?" he asked. "All the divisions of Christendom are in the region of non-essentials. We have made those divisions ourselves by attaching to non-essentials the importance of essentials. Directly we recognise that the only essentials are faith in the God of Love and a life of love and devotion to humanity—directly we recognise this, our furious battles over the non-essentials of dogma and ritual sink into astonished peace. But see what we have been doing ! We have been attacking—there are societies with large funds existing only to attack—our fellow-Christians for teaching a dogma with which we do not agree ! Is that not monstrous ? Those fellow-Christians may worship God, may give food and clothing to the poor, may comfort the sorrowful, visit those who are sick and in prison,

but because they do not think as we think we attack them ! ”

I saw the Great Hope which was shining in this good man's soul. I hailed with something very like rapture a cessation of sectarian strife, a unity of religious service. But I saw another way to bring this hope to consummation.

“ If I judge men aright,” I said to him, “ it would be dangerous to use in the negotiations you propose the words essential and non-essential. Every man believes that his doxy is essential. There must always be strife if we endeavour to say what is essential. Our very declaration of what is essential becomes a dogma over which men would tear the Church of Christ into factions. I do not think there is any more dangerous word in religion than the word *essential*.”

“ I am afraid that is so,” he replied.

“ But there is another way of attaining your end,” I continued. “ Let us try to see if we can obtain from all the various Churches a statement as to the future state. I mean, instead of asking them what is necessary to salvation on earth, let us pin them down to a declaration concerning the destiny of man's soul in the world to come. Will any of them dare to say that a kind and moral man must go to hell ? Would a Ritualist say that Spurgeon is shut

out from heaven? Would a Roman say that General Booth is in hell? Would all the Churches say that Darwin is eternally damned? If we keep to the moral sphere, and if our negotiations only aim at a unanimity of declaration concerning the future state, we shall be almost certain to draw the Churches together. I mean, we shall be standing on the rock of Christ instead of in the schools of theology. Christ came to save men. We shall be using words like Good and Evil, Righteousness and Iniquity, Virtue and Vice. Over those words no quarrel is possible. I think we might succeed by this means not only in drawing the Churches together, but in attracting the allegiance of humanity. There should be only one division in the world—religiously, politically, socially—the division between the Good and the Evil.”

He nodded his head. “You are perfectly right. And what is more to the point, you are enthusiastic. Now I am satisfied! Will you,” he asked, “begin at once negotiations of this kind?”

I said that I would gladly do so.

“Remember my point,” he said, “that the mistake of the past has been our furious internecine conflicts over things that could not possibly affect men’s doom in the next world. However interesting, however important those things may

be, they cannot possibly make a soul either righteous or evil. Foolish, frivolous, unworthy they may be, but they are not of eternal moment. The Eternal God is too big for them. Incense, candles, vestments, genuflexions, and all the rest of it—how could those things possibly send a man's soul to hell? And our business simply lies there—in saving sinful men from hell, in turning all men to the worship of God."

"My one fear," I said, "arises from my knowledge of the professional Christian's rigidity of mind. Will he ever dare to aver that right thinking is not essential to right living?—right thinking, of course, being his own particular form of inherited orthodoxy. Consistency with these narrow minds is a passion. Tolerance is weakness. To be inflexible is a virtue. I fear they will not rise to a less partial comprehension of the universe."

Dr. Garth nodded his head. "I know," he answered. "The most loyal Christians of to-day are like the most loyal Pharisees of the days of Christ. The passion for the letter is a madness with them. And by their insistence on the letter they prevent men from perceiving the beauty and attraction of Christ's Spirit. Nevertheless, I believe that this awakening to the need for action, this sudden perception of the necessity for service,

will sweep all that folly out of existence. There must be, as you say, only one clear division among men, a division of the Good and the Evil, of those who believe in God and of those who believe in Satan. Already there is a movement in that direction among politicians, for to-day's proceedings in the House of Commons must surely lead to the union of all good and virtuous and Christian patriots for the welfare of England. And so it must be with the Churches. Yes, and it is of infinitely more importance that there should be this alliance of the Churches, because politics can only handle the conditions of life. It is religion alone that can save the soul."

I agreed to call upon several prominent Churchmen on the following day, while Dr. Garth was to consult the chief ministers of the Nonconformist Churches. We were both to work for a private conference of these influential men under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Oxford. Our conference was to be brought about as soon as possible, but we were to suggest at once, without a moment's delay, the idea of religious union to the chief newspapers.

"Do not let the wave subside," said my visitor, "before something is done to carry its momentum into an indefinite future."

When he had gone I recollected two engagements. I had promised to call upon Lady Edmund Peverel, and I was to dine at eight o'clock with the Lullingtons.

It was now past six.

My conversation with Dr. Garth had filled me with real enthusiasm for his idea. I do not know that anything in life had ever moved me so profoundly or interested me so vividly. I had always hated sectarian bickering. I had myself lost the religious impulse largely owing to theological contentions. And now it seemed possible to me that humanity might tear itself free from the frightful absurdities of these childish quarrels. The thought of God, which had become so real to so many, might break the spell of sectarianism, might liberate the soul from its theological prison and set it free in the pure air of adoration. What a destiny! What a victory for Christ! What a fulfilment of the words, *I will draw all men unto Me!*

It is a curious fact that with this impulse very strong in my mind I rejected the thought of sending my excuses to Lady Edmund Peverel and to the Lullingtons. I did not feel as the Bishop of Brompton felt that to go out to dinner was waste of time. I did not feel a call to throw myself into the work which had just presented itself so attrac-

tively to my mind. I was perfectly calm and detached.

The thought of my vision in Piccadilly—the vision of the Angel Child—filled my mind with calm. I felt the Presence of God with humanity. I was convinced that there was no hurry. At the same time I acknowledged in my soul the wisdom of Dr. Garth's anxiety concerning reaction.

Without haste I sat down and wrote three very similar notes to friends of mine on the staff of *The Times* and *Morning Post* and *Daily Chronicle*. I merely suggested to them that it might be wise, in their comments on the events of this strange day, to express the hope that the Churches would now sink minor differences and unite their forces for the interests of morality. In each letter I said that the only permanent and hopeless division among men was the moral division of good and evil. This phrase was used, albeit with difference of expression, in the three newspapers. Thus was set moving, thanks to Dr. Garth, that great unifying impulse towards Christian co-operation which seems now as if it has definitely transformed religious activity and broadened the charity of the Christian Church.

When I had sent off these notes I dressed for

dinner, observing for the first time that there was a small dark bruise between my eyes. I left my room soon after seven o'clock and drove to Lady Edmund Peverel's house in Beauchamp Gardens.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

WHEN my cab turned into Piccadilly I saw that the excitement of the afternoon had subsided. But the crowded street presented an unusual spectacle. There was an entire absence of the vicious and tragic element. The clubs appeared to be almost empty. The people walking on the pavements were moving with the pace and earnestness of an army. They seemed to me hurrying forward to a work of importance. I observed many clergymen in this unending procession of humanity; the women were evidently those who at that hour would usually be with their families. This great thronging crowd moving towards the centre of London suggested to my mind a meeting of the British Association or a Church Congress.

I wondered what was the cause of their presence and what the spring of their energy, but as I looked at them I was thinking chiefly of my vision that afternoon, hoping that I might again see the spirit

Child moving in the midst of the populace. In this I was disappointed, although I was destined once again to see that beautiful Presence.

Lady Edmund Peverel received me in the drawing-room, but excusing herself to the other people there and without introducing me to anybody, or even suffering me to greet her children, she carried me at once to her boudoir on the floor above.

"We both know now," she said, with kindling eyes, "what has happened ! Isn't it glorious ? We need not bother ourselves to find the cause. One word is enough. It is God."

"Yes," I replied, "it is God."

"I expect your mind is full of the big things," she said, making me sit down close to her ; "the extraordinary turn in politics, for instance ?"

"No ; that does not seem to me important."

"What interests you most, then ?"

"A union of the Churches."

"That is unimportant, too !" she answered.

"You are so happy with to-day, that you can spare no thoughts for to-morrow."

She shook her head. "You are so influenced by yesterday," she replied, "that you do not realise what has happened to-day. There is only one Church. All those little buildings of brick and stone, with their painted glass and their carved wood, and

their embroideries and brass, and their little set ceremonies, and their little services of formalism—they are the dolls'-houses of religion. The House of God is the World. The only real Church is the company of all those who love God and live to do His Will. What does it matter whether the dolls'-houses are friendly or unfriendly? God has manifested Himself to the World."

I did not argue. I wanted to know what had happened to her since we parted. She was only too eager to narrate her story.

"I will tell you something," she began, "that, manlike, you will probably regard as trivial and silly. But I think it's immensely important, immensely!" She laughed and challenged me with her bright eyes. "You know that I have been an ardent Suffragette, not one of those hateful militants, of course, but a sensible and practical Suffragette. Well, what do you think? I had scarcely got home after depositing your bag in Hertford Street—for which, by the way, you have expressed no thanks, nor for my payment of your enormous cab fare—Oh, no, please don't!—well, I had hardly got home when to my astonishment, to my utmost consternation, Mrs. Frothingham was announced. You know how I have opposed her. You know how I have abused her. You know how I have hated her. And

here she was—this Fire-eater of the Militants—calling to see me! At first—what do you think?—why, I was afraid! Yes, I thought she would set fire to the house, or stab me with a hatpin, at any rate, that she would billingsgate me. And I was afraid. But after a moment I became self-possessed, and all the wonders that I had seen in poor East London came back to my mind to calm me and reassure me. I said to myself, ‘I will go and plead with her.’

“My dear Robert, when I went in to see her she came towards me with both her hands extended, the sweetest smile on her face you ever saw—she’s a most beautiful woman, you know—and she said to me, ‘Lady Edmund, you and I must be friends—for *Christ’s sake*.’ I shall never forget that greeting. I was carried away by it. Nothing can describe the look in her eyes—it was deep, deep, deep with spiritual love. All the hard handsomeness of her face vanished. It was tender and sweet, positively tender and sweet. She has suffered frightfully, and the look of suffering in her face became saintlike and adorable in its gentle tenderness. I was overcome. She seemed the most lofty soul I had ever confronted. I surrendered to the graciousness with which she enveloped me. What do you think I did? I lifted her hands to kiss them. And, Robert, she

took me into her arms, like a mother embracing her daughter, and kissed my brow. 'We are friends,' she said, in her wonderful voice, 'friends, remember, for Christ's sake, which means, friends for ever.'

"And then, Robert, she told me why she had come. She said that early in the morning she had wakened with a feeling of great fear. She felt, not that something dreadful was about to happen, but that something dreadful *had* happened, and that she had been responsible for it. And then, she told me, as she sat there in her bed, guilty and alarmed, the thought of God's existence struck her like a blow. Yes, she said, it struck her, literally struck her, shattering everything of which she had ever thought, so that she fell back on her pillows and was stunned. When she recovered consciousness, she said that her heart filled slowly and gratefully with a sense of happiness, as if she had dreamed some beautiful dream in her trance. And this happiness came only, she said, from the knowledge of God's existence.

"And as she lay there, spelled by the exquisite glory of her knowledge—oh, I wish you could have heard her tell it!—quietly and gradually she saw that her life's work had been a revolt and a rebellion—not against the laws of man, but against the Lamb of God. She had revolted, she had rebelled,

against the Lamb of God. Instead of meekness, lowliness, gentleness, resignation, and submission, she had employed violence and aggression. She had followed the Tiger, not the Lamb. She had defied Christ, she had flouted Christ, she had thrust Him behind her. And for what purpose ? To gain a vote !

“ Then, Robert, she spoke of all the sin in the world, and all the suffering, and all the bitter sorrow, and she said that her life henceforth, in the Name of Christ, was to be given to service of humanity. God had called her, she said, to work for the poor and sorrowful. It was to be at once her reparation and her reward. At first she had contemplated a resignation of her positions in the Suffragette Movement, but something had checked her, something had told her that she must make reparation for the frightful spirit she had called into action among women. And at last it was given her to see what she should do. And what do you think it is ? It is a conversion of the Suffragette Movement into a movement for the spiritual uplifting of women throughout the whole world. She had called to see some of her party before coming to me. Only a very few opposed her. The majority leapt to the idea, touched by the same religious impulse that has visited so many of us to-day. And she wanted

me to join with her, to bring my party over to hers, in the same great cause—the spiritual uplifting of womanhood throughout the world.

“Instead of working for women as if this life ended everything, and as if this world contained the whole universe, and as if legislation could really alter the fundamentals of existence, we are going to work for women’s immortal welfare, for their spiritual welfare. Everything is to be done in the perspective of eternity. We are going to make the mothers of the future the grandest women that have ever lived. We are going to purify and sanctify the human race at its fount. Instead of working for political purposes, our whole great movement is going to work for moral purposes. And when we have got the women of the world, we shall have got the men of the world. If political justice for women should still be necessary then, we shall simply ask men for it, and we shall get it—for *they will be the sons of good women.*”

“And now, you will smile, you will think me small and foolish, for I am going to descend to details.”

She glanced over her shoulder at the clock on the mantelpiece. “You can spare me just five minutes more?” she inquired, turning quickly to me again.

“I shall be late for dinner,” I replied, “but to-

night the cook is not important. I wonder if a single hostess in London is worrying about her dinner."

"Oh, yes. Don't make any mistake. Plenty of people are utterly untouched by this miracle. I'm sure of it. If it were not so, life would be heaven. We shall have to work. We shall have to plead."

"Descend to your details, please."

"Yes, I want to tell you."

She seemed to study me with more attention, as if she were particularly anxious to mark the effect of her words upon my mind. I can see her now, fingering the long chain suspended from her shoulders, her beautiful, gentle, careworn face warm with earnestness, her eyes watching me so anxiously. She noticed the bruise between my eyes and remarked upon it. When I had satisfied her curiosity she proceeded with her details. "Do you know that dress is a very serious thing?" she asked. "I mean from the psychological point of view. Carlyle left out the most important chapter of *Sartor Resartus*. His world contained no women.¹ The question of feminine raiment and its influence on morality is a big question, a serious question. As a Suffragette I believe that the world is very largely what it is through the influence of women. Woman seems to

¹ My friend forgot Book II, Chapter V, with its reference to holy women "hovering mute and inaccessible on the outskirts of Æsthetic Tea."

me not only the fount of life, but the fount of spiritual influence. Leave out of count the tremendous matter of pre-natal influence, and consider the enormous field of woman's direct and actual influence. The babes of the whole world lie at her breast and are utterly in her hands till their souls are self-conscious. After that, if she so choose, none can rival her influence throughout the whole period of childhood. And then with youth comes the other influence of woman, the sexual influence which may be either wonderful or base. And after that there is the influence of wifehood. Is it not in her hands to shape men? Is it not in her power to give them the direction of their lives? Is it not her responsibility to form the Character of the World?

"You agree. Well, woman, we think, is herself influenced, and in no minor degree, by her clothing. The spirit of the harem has got into the milliner's window. Woman in Europe is free, but the old heredity of subjection rules her mind. She thinks she must practise coquetry. She thinks she must make her appeal to the lowest region of man's nature. She is the one thing feminine throughout creation that does not leave coquetry to the masculine gender.

"You must agree to that, too; and then it won't

be necessary for me to keep you beyond the five minutes ! ” She glanced again at the clock. “ I must make an end,” she said, turning round her head. “ Briefly, then, we are going to organise an immense campaign against the courtesan influence in raiment. Instead of a campaign for votes, we are going to begin a campaign for modesty, for simplicity, for dignity. Don’t smile at our idea. I am sure it is practical and wise. Look at it from the man’s standpoint. Men now are attracted by prettiness and frippery. In the zenith of their youthful susceptibility, dazzled by a little fluff, intoxicated even by the narrowness of a shoe, they make choice of a wife—they choose the mothers of posterity ! Will it not be a good thing for men, and a very good thing for posterity, if we present ourselves before them in nobler guise and with more splendid attractions ?

“ Well, that is what we are going to do,” she exclaimed, getting up. “ If you meet any sensible women at the Lullingtons’, tell them to come to me for the new Woman’s Movement ! We must enlist everybody with power and influence. But really, Robert, don’t you think we are setting out on the right lines ? There is something unseemly, surely, in our present fashions. There is something definitely flagrantly irreligious in the very spirit of women’s

dress. One cannot even *think* of St. Mary in the dress of to-day—cannot even think of it. But why? Evidently our dress must be sinful and bad as well as vulgar.

“Now, you must go. But bless our movement with your approval, and help it with your good wishes. You don’t think we are stupid, do you? You see the importance of it? No woman who really believes in God could go about the world robed like a courtesan. Her influence must be bad. And if we can alter that, shall we not alter many other things with it?”

I took her kind hand in mine. “Blessings on your movement,” I said, “and without one smallest smile, without one smallest criticism.”

“I am so glad,” she said. “You don’t know the exultation this movement gives one. Mrs. Frothingham told me that it was fifty thousand times more inspiring than campaigning for a vote. Think of it, a campaign for modesty, for simplicity, for dignity. A campaign against folly and vice. A campaign for the motherhood of humanity!”

As I was going down the stairs, I said to her: “Let me give you an idea. In every field of life, this great tidal wave of religious feeling is going to obliterate the confusions of our old unintelligent divisions. When it has passed, our business will be

to set up the one and only division which really matters—the division of Good and Evil. If you do that in the world of women you will accomplish a great work. Dress among women, the spirit of the looking-glass, more than anything else has tended to tone away that shade of difference, which is the difference between light and darkness. I am sure it will be a better world, a much better world, when all good women stand clear away from everything that is marked with the mark of evil. At the present day, as you know, whether it be at the Opera, at Goodwood, in Bond Street, or on the Riviera, it is not always easy to distinguish the mother of daughters from the mistress of that mother's son. I think that ladies nowadays imitate the courtesans ; in my youth, it was the courtesan who tried to dress like a lady."

It is a curious fact that as I uttered these last words there revived in my memory the scene before the music-hall which had led to my acquaintance with the dead babe. I seemed to see descending the stairs in front of me a young girl with lifted skirts and with silly gilt shoes which appeared to me malicious and devilish.

CHAPTER XIX

A DINNER PARTY

MRS. LULLINGTON'S guests were talking eagerly and excitedly of the events of the day when I arrived at the house a few minutes after eight o'clock. The event which most interested them was the debate in the House of Commons. The action of the Opposition was universally condemned.

I was struck by the appearance of the women, coming as I did straight from my conversation with Lady Edmund Peverel. These women, I am perfectly sure, were all virtuous and of unblemished reputation. They were rather brilliant and clever. It would have been difficult in any capital of the world to find a company of women more polished and well-bred. But in the manner of their dress there was no difference whatever between these beautiful and virtuous creatures of London society and the more prosperous *cocottes* of the Parisian *demi-monde*.

This dinner party was the strangest experience of the most wonderful day in my life. I must endeavour to set down as clearly as possible the spirit of that entertainment and the effect it made upon me. For I suppose, if it can be faithfully done, a description of this party may help usefully a future and a more spiritual generation to understand the subtle as well as the immense change which was effected at this period of civilisation in the spirit of our national life.

To begin with, I would have the reader know that there was no one of that company whose presence could be considered an affront to the Bishop of Brompton—the guest who did not come. The men were eminent in politics, in literature, and in science. The women, as I have already said, were virtuous and well-bred. Nothing was done, nothing was said, in the least degree offensive to the very nicest propriety. And yet I never felt in my life more wretched and unhappy, more completely out of harmony with my fellow-creatures. Not a single person of that company had been touched by the miracle. Not one of them had the least welcome for the change.

The man most in evidence as I entered the room was a distinguished Politician. He stood with his back to the mantelpiece, his hands thrust in his

trouser pockets, his shoulders more humped and crouching than usual, his head sunk, his hard long-chinned hatchet face gloomed with bitterness.

On one side of him was a famous Professor of Physics—fat, coarse, elephantine, and plethoric. On the other was a clever Author, enjoying just then a fashionable reputation for his remorseless realism in the region of disagreeable sexualism. The Politician was speaking slowly and sulkily, with great bitterness. As he spoke he shuffled with one of his shoes on the hearth-rug, as though impatient to be kicking someone. The Professor, whose large face wore the cheerful waiting smile of one anxious to break in with some amusing remark, was picking at his watch-chain and turning it over in his fingers, while his eyes darted to right and left of him at the other people in the room. The Author, facing towards the Politician, was studying his own reflection in the glass.

In front of this group were three or four ladies seated in low chairs, who were rather painfully affecting the greatest interest in politics. Their brows were contracted, their heads were at inquiring angles, their eyes—which wandered every now and then quickly and guiltily to their skirts and the tips of their shoes—were almost fixed in concentration.

Lullington stood among these chairs—a broad-shouldered, corpulent, red-faced host; as honest a man, I think, as ever lived to enjoy himself, as kind-hearted and tolerant a man as ever did without brains.

“Well,” said the Politician, giving me a nod, “what do you think of it?”

“Ah!” exclaimed Lullington, with a chuckle that made his cheeks shake, “here’s our Machiavelli of politics. Yes. What do *you* think about it?” He put up his eyeglass and beamed down upon the ladies expectant of smiles.

The Professor regarded me with pursed lips and a frown of disapproval. The Author examined me with a professional interest, but rather languidly. He turned the rings on his fingers as he took my measure.

Mrs. Lullington sailed towards us before I could answer. The ladies in the chairs began to talk among themselves.

Mrs. Lullington said to me: “Isn’t it dreadful? Or, don’t you think it is dreadful?” She glanced about her, her long earrings shaking, her chains tinkling, her thin pretty face flushed and excited. “The Bishop of Brompton was to be here, but he has lost his head in the general excitement. What can it be? What has happened to the world? And this utterly mad thing in the House of Commons.

But perhaps you don't think it is mad. What do you think of it? Do tell us. I'm longing to hear what you think. But what is that bruise on your forehead? Have you been fighting?" She ended by introducing me to the Author.

I forget what I said in answer to the question of the Politician, but it was a reply which did not commit me. At that moment dinner was announced, and we went down the stairs, a party of fourteen. The lady on my arm said to me, "I think General Booth must have come back again!" She expressed her satisfaction that there was at least one house in London where dinner would be served in the ordinary way.

"And without Grace," I said.

"Oh, I hope it will never come to that!" she exclaimed, laughing.

I felt like a man in a dream. The large and beautiful room, with its deep crimson hangings, its soft lights, its brilliant table gorgeous with rare flowers and shining with the deep lustre of silver, the women with their naked breasts and arms, the men with their hard or sensual faces, the unnecessarily numerous servants in dark liveries moving to and fro, the oppressive atmosphere of the warm, scented room, the sense of an utterly ignorant and unashamed luxury in the dishes, the silly chatter,

the insolent comments on things of the deepest and profoundest moment—these things hit hard upon my awakened conscience. I experienced the feelings of a Puritan.

Mrs. Lullington told me afterwards that she thought I must be ill, so depressed did I seem, so silent and morose. She noticed the bruise on my forehead and was curious to ask me if I had fallen, but feared a possible awkwardness in the question. “You are always restrained,” she said; “you are sometimes very reticent; but on that occasion you were really an ogre. It was not the absence of the Bishop, but your presence that spoilt my dinner party.”

The truth is I found everything very disagreeable. I saw the people, I saw this particular way of living, I saw this particular way of thinking, in a new light. The whole thing appeared to me now unreal and yet unseemly, meaningless and yet profane, frivolous and yet perilous. There were times when I was seized by a frantic desire to overturn the table and thunder anathema: times when I only wanted to flee from the cruelty and discomfort of an atmosphere merely discordant: times when I took a savage pleasure in studying my fellow-guests, like so many insects, with contempt and delight in their certain destruction.

The Author, who was sitting on the opposite side of the table, had evidently learned that I was a person of some importance. He laid himself out to please me. He let me see that he set no store on the beautiful woman beside his chair. His eyes constantly sought mine with an understanding smile. He dropped his languid manner. He became charming and agreeable. He talked to attract my attention.

Towards the end of the meal he spoke to me about French literature, with which he was well acquainted, and made an amusing comparison between the cleverest Frenchmen and the most popular English novelists. He asked me to agree that we in England had not yet perceived the seriousness of the novel. Only second-rate English writers, he said, took the novel seriously, and they were too serious. "They give us the religious novel," he declared ; "nothing could be more tedious ! But in England to be serious is to be religious. It is our one conception of seriousness."

I asked him if reality was not essential to a good novel. My natural mood of agreeableness deserted me ; I was annoyed to find myself speaking trenchantly and with a hateful note of self-assertion in my voice.

He agreed.

"Can there be reality without religion?" I asked, in the same spirit, powerless to fight against it.

"Oh, surely!" he exclaimed. "At least I hope so! It would be dreadful if it were not so."

"I thought man's attitude to the universe was the essential soul of life's reality."

"But does he not reveal that attitude in his human existence?"

"By ignoring it?" I asked.

"Well, that is perhaps the modern tendency. Humanity has become tired of asking questions. The heavens, you will admit, do not keep up a particularly lively conversation with us. They are rather dull, those heavens. If they spoke a little more and rained a little less how much nicer it would be! Wouldn't it? Oh, one must surely live the life of this world and leave the sequel to the gods. Only a superman can write a good sequel. Don't you agree?"

I knew I could not make him understand, but I said: "My point is that no one can live the life of this world intelligently without religion. One may write novels about eating and drinking, chatting and giggling, without religion; but one cannot write a novel about life, about the great things in life, without it. The temperaments of over-civilised

women may be interesting, but they are not so important to humanity as immortality. A man to whom God is Reality will hardly be able to leave religion out of his novels. You will agree that the modern novel would be very different if it were perfectly certain that God exists. In any case, I devoutly hope that the clever novel will pass away. I am quite sure that people will be reading the Psalms long after our realists are forgotten—not because the Psalms are better literature, but because they express the deepest feelings of the human heart. Death and Sorrow will outlast our epigrams.”

He raised his hands for a moment in pious horror, but laughed amiably and exclaimed: “The first infirmity of writers is to think of royalties: the last, to think of posterity! There is only one posterity—it is the choicest spirits of our contemporaries. Oh, but, of course, I agree.” His face affected seriousness. “There must be the spirit of religion in a good book. There is the spirit of religion in all great art—painting, music, sculpture. Wilde felt that, did he not? But the religious novel is not religious. It is only dreary.”

“But the spirit of religion in the modern novel is the spirit of frank agnosticism.”

“Not frank, I think. A little jaded, a little regretful, or little wistful, but not frank. We are

sorrowful. The gods are dead. We are in mourning for them." He raised his glass and drank with the air of a comic undertaker.

The Professor, sitting on the other side of my right-hand neighbour, had been listening to our conversation. He leaned towards the Novelist and said, "You ought not to ignore religion."

The Novelist raised his eyebrows. "I am beset on all sides!" he exclaimed.

"You ought to attack it!" said the Professor. He drew his napkin coarsely across his mouth, and leaning still further over the table proceeded to say that the novel would never be taken seriously until it ranged itself definitely on the side of science. The novel, he said, ought to be the enemy of superstition. Instead of mourning for dead gods the novelist should be charging at the head of the legions of civilisation against the humbug of creeds. "Why don't you come to us for your inspiration?" he asked; "or if you don't like the word, for your ammunition? We can supply you, I assure you we can."

I looked at him and asked: "Have you really settled everything?"

"That's rather a foolish question, if you'll allow me to say so," he said, meeting my eyes only for a moment and looking across the table to the

Novelist. "We are clearing away the rubbish of the past. . . ."

"And with that rubbish goes God?" I inquired.

"Yes, if you like to put it so." He laughed, rolling his bloodshot eyes upon me.

"Would it not be more modest," I asked, "before getting rid of God, to explain so elementary a thing as the beginning of life on this trivial planet?"

"Forgive me, you are evidently not acquainted with modern discovery."

"Discovery!"

"Well?" He was quite angry with me and challenged me rudely. I detested this man—a butcher.

"You have discovered, then, the origin of life on this planet?" I asked. "You have discovered? You know?"

"Sufficient for our purpose. We know enough to do without six days of creation!"

"On the contrary," I said, "you know only that you do not know. Oh, please, you must not fulminate! Science is by no means yet in a position to set up her Vatican. Professors must behave as modestly as clergymen. Pray remember that you cannot tell us how the least of germs contrived to exist on this red-hot and flaming planet when it came from the sun. You guess that a shower of

meteoric dust descended when the earth was cool. In that way came life—the rose, the butterfly, the stag, the forest, and the fields. And in that way came man—with his mathematics, his music, and his theories of the cosmos. Are you respectful to the meaning of words when you speak of this fantastic supposition as a *discovery* ? ”

The Novelist laughed in a gentle and pacifying manner. “How delicious,” he exclaimed, “to see men seriously concerned with origins ! And that idea,” he bowed to me, “of the red-hot fuliginous earth leaping out of the sun—how picturesque, how wonderful ! I had never thought about it. The most tenacious of microbes, I am told, gives up the ghost in a pot of boiling water. How did life come ?—how could life come ? ” He turned to the Professor, reproachful, smiling, pleased with himself. “Yes, really, that’s most interesting. How did life begin on a red-hot poker of a planet ? ”

“And why,” I asked, “did the shower of meteoric dust stop abruptly ? why is it not bringing new forms of life to us now, and, above all, whence did it come ? ”

The Professor had turned his shoulder and was talking to a neighbour.

When the ladies had retired, leaving their little gold-tipped cigarettes smouldering in their coffee-

saucers, conversation turned solely upon the political emergence of the day.

The Politician was the person of importance. He slouched low in his chair, on the right of Lullington, one hand in his pocket, the other holding a cigar which he continually tapped on a plate in front of him.

We grouped ourselves about him, and he spoke angrily of the pass into which the debate had landed the party.

“But the newspapers?” asked Lullington.

A young man said, “I saw Waterhouse this afternoon. He was just going off to see the Editor of the *Daily Mail*.”

“Is there an Editor of the *Daily Mail*?” asked the Author, raising his eyebrows.

“The halfpenny newspapers,” said the Politician, who did not join in the laughter, “are the only newspapers that people read, and they have no influence. None whatever. They blaze at this confounded Government for gagging debate in the House of Commons, and they themselves give half a column to our speeches! No! The thing’s done, and we shall have to fight in opposition for five years more.” He looked across the table at me and asked: “Have you heard anything?”

I shook my head.

"What do you think of it?" he demanded.

"From a party point of view," I replied, "I should say it is bad for your side."

"Exactly," he said; "it's fatal."

"But from a national point of view," I went on, "I should think it might be useful."

"That's part of the general madness," he said contemptuously. "The whole genius of our political system is the conflict between two schools of thought. Directly there is fusion you throw the reins on the neck of reform. There is no check. The thing runs away with you."

"But the country is in a bad way?" I asked, watching him.

"I should say it was quite certainly going to the devil," he answered.

"In other words, it is on its deathbed?"

"And it won't be so long about the business as Charles the Second!" he rejoined.

"Well, the two parties are supposed to be looking after it," I said; "at any rate their purpose is to effect a cure?"

"Oh, you're thinking of the speech this afternoon!" he interrupted, with impatience. "The two doctors in consultation—rhetoric, sentiment, humbug, rot! That part of the speech made me feel sick."

The Professor laughed. "I should think so," he said. "It would make any rational man feel sick."

"But do men of science arrive at scientific truth," I asked, "by fighting each other?"

The Politician sat up in his chair and bent over the plate in front of him, looking down at the ash he had patterned with the end of his cigar. "Politics is a different game from anything else in life. You can't compare it," he said. "An Opposition is bound to oppose. And the fundamental difference between Tory and Radical admits of no co-operation. They can never be allies. They must always be at war. It is largely a matter of class feeling. We stand for the ancient arrangement of society. We don't like the mob, we distrust the mob, and we hate the mob. If we had our way we'd change the franchise wholesale. We believe in reform as the considered judgment of aristocratic power, not as the appetite of a dirty, ignorant democracy. Radicals know jolly well that democracy is a great fat, greasy, drunken beast. A fellow like Lloyd George, with the soul of a Baptist minister or a Wesleyan greengrocer, may pretend to love the people; but the rest of them hate the people just as much as we do. Of course they do. Who could love the mob? Who could? No; it's all balder-

dash. Look at the difference between us ! The Tory stands for individualism, for keeping the ring, for letting things work themselves out with as little interference as possible. The Radical stands for perpetual interference. Doctors in consultation ! The Tory wants nature to cure the patient with a little help from nursing and medicine. The Radical wants to cut him up and see what's going on inside ! ”

He got up, heavy and lumbering and disgusted, lifting his cigar to his mouth. “It's all d——d rot ! ” he said savagely. “Something has happened like a burst of fanaticism. Men are losing their heads. They talk about political economy and morals in the same breath. It's a madness. How the devil the thing has happened so suddenly, I can't for the life of me make out, but that's what it is—an outbreak of fanaticism, of *religious zeal* ! God help the country ! ”

He laid his cigar down and looked at the clock.

I was struck by my inability to argue with him, or to speak with enthusiasm of the new movement in religion. That morning I had kissed the cheek of a drunkard. I had allowed a hooligan to strike me. I had appealed to the lowest of men and women to think of their souls. And here I was speechless and contemptuous among men of education.

Why could I not speak now as I had spoken a few hours before ? Where was the glow, the thrill, the passion of my conscious spiritual life ?

What most struck me about these people was their *hardness*. The doors of their minds and the doors of their hearts were closed, and those doors were of brass. They had no pity for suffering or distress, no sympathy for pain and sorrow, no anxiety to learn the truth of actual existence. Life was good for them, and they wished life to be as it was. Disturbance of any kind angered them. They lived as if there was no peril in the world's unrest.

As we went upstairs to the drawing-room, the chatter of these men about me, I found myself repeating the words, *Cast not your pearls before swine*. And then at the door came those words, *There are some that would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead*.

Mrs. Lullington almost ran towards her husband as we entered the room. "Rex !" she exclaimed, all her jewellery tinkling and her hands clasped at her breast, "what do you think Angela has just told me ? What *do* you think ? Lily Carruthers has gone off with Dicky Finch !"

CHAPTER XX

TWO MYSTICS

FULL-ORBED and with a burning radiance the moon rose that night above the roofs of London. I walked gladly away from the Lullingtons' house. There was a sense of grateful freshness, almost of cold, in the night air. A wonderful charm breathed from the curtained houses and through the long street twinkling with lights. Something of superhuman mystery and something of quite simple human kindness came to me in this atmosphere of the great city. It was good to be out in the open air. It was good to be in London, at the very heart of the world, conscious of God.

I lost the feeling of discordance which had troubled me. I moved at every step into a closer harmony with existence. My faith recovered its tranquillity. My soul rose again into the luminous heaven of delicious imagination with the thought of God for her wings. What mattered anything now? Why be troubled by littleness, by trivial vul-

garity, even by ignorant hardness of heart ? God existed !

I lifted up my heart as I walked. I repeated in my mind, with a feeling of the most splendid joy, words I had not heard since boyhood—*Lift up your hearts ! We lift them up unto the Lord. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God. It is meet and right so to do. It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.*

I found myself laughing aloud. The thought of the Author had presented itself suddenly to my mind. I recalled his epigram about the heavens that rained and did not speak. I wondered if he would ever live to compare such kindergarten utterance with the exclamation, nay, the pæan of a soul conscious of mystery, conscious of grandeur, conscious of bliss—*Lift up your hearts ! We lift them up unto the Lord. . . .*

The Professor's face swam into my vision, and his harsh, truculent assertive voice rasped upon my memory. I laughed again. How droll, how preposterous, how immodest, the attitude of that little mind to the fathomless and boundless universe filled full with the majesty of God ! Did he never get away from his test-tubes, his balances, his

microscope, his text-books, and stand still, perfectly still, on the thin crest of this enormous star, looking up into eternity, gazing onward into infinity? *Lift up your hearts!* Had he even written words that would live as long as these? *We lift them up unto the Lord!* Had he ever glimpsed the wonder of spiritual exaltation? *It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.*

And then, looking up into the clear sky, and past the rapture of the bright moon into the depths of space, I felt myself one with the multitudinous hosts of God exulting in their power to praise, rejoicing in their capacity to love. *Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name, evermore praising Thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: Glory be to Thee, O Lord most High.*

My joy was unbroken, my bliss was untroubled, when the thought of the embittered Politician suddenly presented itself before my mind. It seemed to me amusingly incredible that men should earnestly and even painfully concern themselves with the arid business of politics, the quarrelsome, vulgar, and abortive business of politics, when all that the world

needed for millennium, obviously and beyond cavil, was faith in God. Could anything effect more for humanity than faith in God? Could any law bring peace on earth, goodwill towards men without faith in God? If everybody had enough to eat, and lived in comfortable houses, and did not have to work over-hard, would there not still be something lacking, would not the basic problem of man's unrest still remain unsolved? Why baffle the brain with problems that must for ever remain insoluble without faith in God? Faith in God! A God of Love. An everlasting God. A God Who had created man for Himself. A God, the very thought of Whom drenches the soul to drowning with ineffable, unutterable bliss? And they talk of wages, of housing, of insurance, of establishing this and disestablishing that! *Lift up your hearts unto the Lord.*

Then I saw that the old world was passing away, that a new world was at birth. I said to myself, "Think no more of politics, concern yourself with nothing in the past, set your thoughts solely on this new world born with the thought of God."

At the end of the street where I was walking three drunken roughs appeared, arm in arm, sprawling and lurching, and singing hideously at the tops of their husky voices. I watched their approach with

a feeling of disgust. I wondered how long it must be before the new world was rid of such degradation, such hideous and repellent defamation of God's purpose.

They were bawling a sentimental music-hall song about love. I sickened and shuddered. The travesty set fire to my indignation. "These," I thought, "are the swine of whom Christ spoke." The most beautiful passion of the human heart, set to almost the most beautiful of all the arts—thus to be profaned in the streets by drunken creatures meant to be angels, determined to be devils !

As these thoughts passed through my mind, two women crossed quickly from the opposite side of the road, and got in front of the three lurchers. The song ceased. One of the drunkards endeavoured to embrace the women, and was held up affectionately by his companions as he stumbled and reeled.

As I drew level with the group, I heard one of the women say : " Suppose somebody is very ill. Suppose somebody is dying. Or, suppose some little child is just dead, and the father and mother are weeping in their grief. How your song must hurt ! How your loud voices must pain and distress ! "

I stopped to listen ; if need caused, to protect the ladies.

One of the drunkards muttered and mumbled :
“A man has a right to sing when he’s happy. What right have you to interfere? We’re not hurting anybody. We’re not molesting anybody. We’re going home, happy and comfortable.”

The same woman who had spoken before interrupted him : “Listen to me, do. You are a man. God has given you a brain. You are not an animal, and you are not a stone. You can understand what is said. How can you be so thoughtless as to go shouting and screaming through the streets? Don’t you know that your noise must disturb somebody? Don’t you know that you must disturb and distress people?”

The other woman said : “Besides, you are drunk, and you know a man who is drunk ought to creep home guilty and ashamed, for he has made himself lower than any animal or any insect. A man ought not to go home singing when he is drunk. Drunkenness is a sin against God and a sin against man. There are only a very few things more disgusting than drunkenness.”

The men were beginning to argue, when the first woman said to them : “Now, don’t say another word. You are in a pitiable and a dreadful state. You know it. And I expect you have spent money that ought to go to your wives and children. I

dare say your wives and children will be hungrier and shabbier and colder this week just because you are drunk to-night. If you were to die now, what could become of you ? Where do you think your souls would go ? Are you not guilty of gross and cruel sin ? Now, hear me. From to-night no drunken man will pass through the streets of London without being warned ; and not only will drunken men be warned, they will be followed to their homes. And very soon their wives and children will be taken away from them, and they themselves will be locked up and made to work for their wives and children until they are fit to live with decent people. Can you understand what I say ? Yes, you can understand. So go home thinking of what I have said to you. Remember, you have no excuse. You have been warned. You know right from wrong. God will not punish you, but you will punish yourselves."

After some further words, the drunkards walked off, and I spoke to the two ladies as they were moving away.

They told me that some of the chief temperance societies had determined that day to conduct a personal crusade in the streets, particularly at night. "There are thousands of us, for instance, out to-night," said one of them ; "some of us actually

sitting in public-houses—for we intend to invade the enemy's territory—and others walking about the streets, every one pleading, warning, and helping as the various cases demand."

The other lady spoke of "the Revival," and said that it would inspire the temperance societies to a much more active crusade. "We have been," said she, "far too lax, and far too lazy of recent years. We have almost entirely trusted to an education propaganda. That is good. But imagine how any of us who believe in God could have endured to sit calmly and contentedly in our homes while the streets were full of drunken men and drunken women! I think we must have been lying under some evil enchantment. It seems to us now like a madness. Just think of those three dreadful and perishing creatures going home without one word of warning! We have spoken to at least thirty other drunkards this evening, some of them women. We took one poor woman home, and you never saw such a pigsty in your life. There were seven children waiting for her in terror, half-naked, horribly dirty, and so dreadfully hungry! Three of them were hiding under the bed, afraid of her blows—imagine that at the centre of Christian civilisation! We set the home to rights, and provided food for the children. We shall visit the woman in future till she

reforms. If she does not reform, we shall see that she is prosecuted."

I took my leave of these vigorous women, and continued my way home.

In Piccadilly the crowd was not at all great, and there was no sign of excitement or of lawlessness. I had not proceeded far when I encountered the clergyman whom I had thought of visiting that morning when I left East London—the scholarly mystic whose saintly life had made a marked impression on a rather important quarter of the world.

He would have passed by me if I had not stopped him. His head was lowered, his eyes were bent upon the ground, he was walking swiftly with his hands behind him.

"I wanted very much to see you this morning," I said to him.

"You would not have found it easy to discover me!" he replied, with a smile. "Since six o'clock I have been anywhere in London except in my room. Do you know that something has happened? The Church is alive! What do you think of such a miracle as that?"

"Not only the Church," I said.

"Yes," he said, with emphasis, "*only* the Church. No one else, and nothing else. *Only* the Church—the company of all those who acknowledge God.

If you inquire you will find that this wonderful and beautiful miracle—the answer to many prayers—has only touched the servants of God. The godless are untouched. They cannot understand it. But all those souls who have been conscious of God, however dimly, however vaguely, however strugglingly—they are assured to-day that God exists, and they will save the world.”

I told him some of my experiences, which confirmed his point of view—his term “the Church” covering, as it ought to do, the vast multitude of those who serve God whatever their creeds may be.

He said to me: “I must tell you one of my experiences. I woke this morning before six o’clock with just such a feeling concerning God as Brother Laurence describes in his *Practise of the Presence of God*. I had the happy feeling of a boy. I felt extraordinarily young. I was simply energy incarnate. I rose at once, determined to begin there and then a work which has been for some time nestling at my heart. I went off as soon as possible to the Archbishop. I found him in a frame of mind very like my own. He was quite enthusiastic and joyous, and we both ascribed our feelings to the beautiful weather. Then I told him why I had come. I came to propose that the Anglican Church should reform its finances. I can’t bear to think of the

existence of rich clergymen when there are poor clergymen struggling in poverty. It makes our appeal to the cold, heartless, and cynical world—that is to say, to the world we *must not* ignore, but the very world it is our business to save—it makes our appeal to that world weak and without the force of reality. I don't want to see clergymen rich, I want to see them poor. But I simply cannot bear the inequalities which exist now. And so I spoke burningly to the Archbishop. And it was very amusing to see how the dear man struggled in vain to acquire his natural non-committal look of the statesman, his customary manner of balancing and weighing every proposition put before him. He simply could not do it! He laughed himself, and rubbed his hands—he was just like a delightful boy!—and said that the thing must be done, and be done at once. 'I feel this morning,' he said, 'not like the last of the Archbishops, but like the first of the Apostles.' He was really overflowing with energy. And, strangely enough, three other men came with very similar propositions, and when we sat down to breakfast, the Archbishop pointed to the silver dishes, and said with a most charming gaiety, 'Do any of you know the story of Saint Richard, Bishop of Chichester in the middle of the thirteenth century? His brother said to him one

day, You give away more than your income. Then, replied Richard, sell my silver ; it will never do for me to drink out of silver cups while our Lord is suffering in His poor ; our fathers drank heartily out of common crockery, and so can I ; sell the plate ! That is how I feel this morning,' he cried, rubbing his hands, 'I feel that I want to get the whole Church into the streets of life and into the homes of men.' It was splendid to hear him. Well, we talked till noon, and as we talked men kept coming with news of the Revival manifesting itself everywhere, and before we had parted we were almost a Church Congress, and we had determined on a course of action. We are going to reform the Church root and branch. Instead of inequalities, we shall have all things in common. Our beautiful country rectories are to be turned into nursing-homes and hostels and sanctuaries. Our clergy are not to be stationary—this man in poverty, that man in wealth ; this man in a slum, that man in a village—no, they are to be always on the move. We shall have a brigade of the best preachers continually sweeping the country from end to end ; a brigade of missionaries continually organising enthusiasm in every parish ; a brigade of holy women moving through every city administering the charities of the Church. And those men and women who do hold stations, are to

hold them only for two or three years. There will be a constant interchange of the urban and rural clergy. No man will be left to break his heart in the slums, and no man will be left to grow torpid in the villages. We shall have less tennis and garden-parties in the shires, and less heart-breaking and despair in the industrial quarters. And there is to be a brigade of clergy whose sole work will be to attack evil—our great fighting legion. We are not only going to call the righteous, we are not only going to save sinners ; we are going to make war on the devil and all his angels. In every town all over England, our fighting legion will attack those breeders of iniquity who are at present unchallenged. Yes, we intend to howl indecent plays off the stage and indecent exhibitions out of cinematograph theatres, to make bonfires of indecent books and newspapers, to tear indecent placards off the hoardings, to denounce sweaters by name, to stop every drunkard and every harlot on the street, to make war on the bookmaker, to prosecute every publican who permits drunkenness on his premises, and to expose at whatever cost in the law courts every swindler of every kind, whether he be the advertiser of a worthless patent medicine or a fraudulent company-promoter. In a word, the Church is awake and on the march. The Anglican

branch of the Church, at any rate, is taking the field and I believe we shall have the whole Church of Christ on our side. We intend to cleanse England, to cleanse her from head to foot."

"Of course I am glad to hear what you tell me," I said to him; "but I am rather surprised to find you so interested in this activity. It does not seem your *métier*. Do you know why I wanted to come and see you this morning?"

He smiled. "I can guess. Well, I do not think I have lost my affection for mysticism. In this Revival—in the new look in the faces of my brother clergy—I am conscious of mysticism. It seems to me that the mystic sees deeper into the mysteries of God when he is looking for them among men instead of in books. Why, this great vast city of London seems to me now, every stone of it, every light in it, every tree and flower of it, every man and woman and child breathing its strange air, an open book of the spiritual life."

"I wanted to ask you a question," I said.

"Did I anticipate this Revival or can I explain it?"

"Yes."

He looked at me, his pale face shining in the glow of the lamps, his light-coloured eyes smiling with spiritual fire. "I did not anticipate the miracle,

but I think I can explain it," he said slowly. "It means that we were a perishing nation, a nation perishing in our sleep, and that God has mercifully visited and redeemed His people. As God breathed into the nostrils of Adam and he became a living soul, so has He breathed now into His Church and it too has become a living soul." He regarded me silently for a moment. "I think you understand," he added. "I see that you understand. We were literally a perishing nation. It was not God's Will that we should perish. To save us has come another Pentecost."

With that he left me.

It was now the hour when the theatres empty and when the restaurants are crowded with supper-parties. Instead of turning off into Hertford Street, I continued along Piccadilly, and came to the Circus, which was just beginning to fill with people. I crossed to the refuge where the flower-sellers sit by day with their baskets of button-holes beside the fountain, and studied the scene that surrounded me on every side. There were as many vehicles as ever crossing and re-crossing the open space that was dazzled with light. The processions of people on every pavement were as dense as ever. The great entrances to restaurants and supper-rooms were like the openings of enchanted caves. Motor-

buses drew up at the kerb's edge and were instantly besieged by crowds of people. Taxi-cabs passed in a continuous line. Carriages and expensive motor-cars glided away into the night. The noise of the great city going homeward filled the moonlit air.

It was the same London, and yet a different London. There was a happiness in the faces of the people I had never seen there before, a spirit of kindness among those dense crowds which was new to me. And everywhere I looked, whether on the pavements or into the interiors of vehicles passing before me, I observed an entire and complete absence of the vicious element.

As I stood on my refuge, I noticed a party of people entering one of the restaurants. They attracted my attention by reason of their strange and incongruous appearance. Among them were men and women of fashion, but the greater number consisted of working-people. They were getting out of several taxi-cabs and stood in quite a small crowd at the entrance to the restaurant, laughing and talking together in the best of humours.

I crossed the road and followed them into the supper-room. They were taking their seats at the large centre table which was beautifully decorated with flowers. I heard them talking about the

performance they had witnessed at a music-hall. The workmen were looking about them wide-eyed at the luxury of their surroundings ; the women were fingering their bonnet-strings and glancing at the other people in the large room.

The waiter who attended to me said that several similar parties were being given in the other rooms. " It's a new craze ! " he said, with a cynical smile. " Ladies and gentlemen have taken parties of poor people to the theatres, and they bring them on here for a final treat. I do not think it will last very long."

I was both amused and interested by the scene. These workpeople brought an air of reality into the restaurant. Food seemed to be important. Their faces, marked with that stern realism which comes to those who have to struggle with hardships, made an interesting contrast with the softer, stupider, and more blasé faces of the habitual customers. And in some way it seemed to me that the gilding and the paintings, the fine carpets and the expensive decorations of the place, did not jar, but had meaning and value. I thought of feudal times when the whole nation in all its classes met at the supper-tables of the great lords. It seemed to me that social life ought to be as dignified and splendid as possible.

One of the workmen was evidently a humorist ;

he talked like Sancho Panza as he ate, and what he said made all the other guests laugh very heartily. He told stories to which the ladies and gentlemen of the party listened with delight. He was evidently a droll, warm-hearted person.

A stranger came and sat at the opposite side of my table. He made no apology for his intrusion ; rather he surveyed me with the look of annoyance which an old customer bestows upon one who has usurped his customary place. He was tall, dark, saturnine. The biliousness of his complexion was deepened by the blackness of his hair and moustache, and by the darkness of his large eyes. It was a singularly ill-favoured countenance.

He ordered his supper in a peremptory manner, and then, glancing for a moment with angry contempt at the party in the centre of the room, opened the evening paper which he had brought with him and began to read.

I thought to myself, "Here is a man who might pass very well for the Devil himself. He would make a character in a book. One could make something of his sudden and silent entrance into this place, and the black look which he cast at those people over there."

He remained buried in the paper till the waiter appeared with his supper.

I was on the point of getting up to go, when he addressed me. "I knew this thing was going to happen," he said abruptly, fixing his eyes upon me. Then he demanded, "Did you expect it?"

Before I could think what I was saying, I replied, "I expected something miraculous to happen this year, but I did not foresee such a revolution."

"I knew everything," he replied, lifting his glass.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"I am an occultist," he said brusquely.

For a moment we were silent. He then stooped down and picked up the paper which he had dropped on the floor. "The most interesting thing about this revolution, as you call it, is the action of the great landowners," he said, folding back a page. "All that business over there"—he nodded to the centre table—"is merely sentimental. It will do more harm than good, and it will not last. But there is reason in what the landowners are about. I foretold such a policy two years ago."

"You mean the pulling down of slum houses?"

"Not in the least. I regard that as silly. No; I refer to the action of those landlords who intend to develop their country estates as a shopkeeper or a merchant develops his business in a city. I see that more than twenty landlords have set about this work to-day. Cottages are to be built; co-operative

stores are to be erected; pasture is to be ploughed up into market-gardens. This means that the exodus from the country will stop. It means that later on there will be an exodus from the towns. And that is the only thing that matters. The Duke of Derbyshire says, 'I intend that my villages shall offer greater happiness to rational men than any town in the world. They will have theatres for folk-plays, gymnasiums, swimming-baths, cricket grounds, and skating-rinks. Instead of taverns and ale-houses I shall provide restaurants in the woods, where people may eat as well as drink, where they may listen to music, and, if they choose, picnic under the trees. I shall form regiments of the young men and teach them shooting, scouting, and marching. The girls will be instructed in cooking and needlework. My sons will go to Canada, Australia, and Rhodesia with those who wish to emigrate, and will form similar villages in those countries, carrying on the English tradition. My daughters will form glee societies and teach dancing and acting to the villagers. We shall have our own doctors attached to the estate. Everyone will be taught the science of human life. Nurseries and play-gardens will be provided for children. Existence will be organised. I have already given orders to put a hundred acres of my land under glass, I

am converting a thousand acres into market-gardens. I intend to start village industries so that we may be entirely self-supporting. At the end of five years I shall make arrangements for the entire estate to be administered on the principles of Co-Partnership.' ”

He put down the paper, and turned to his supper again. “That is common sense,” he said. “Not one word about God ! It will save the country.”

“You set no store by the religious feeling which is at work ? ” I asked him.

“The greatest mistake in the world,” he said, “is to interfere with the punishments which fall upon miserable creatures. You, I think, are something of an occultist, too, and therefore you must know that these punishments are beneficent. The folly of Christianity, and its danger, is the spirit of philanthropy it engenders in the souls of irrational zealots. Christianity attempts to perpetuate life, whether it is good life or bad life ; it attempts, also, to avert the chastisement which overtakes the ignorant and vile ; it interferes with the scheme of things. The most dangerous word in the world is the word Love. I would wipe it out of existence.”

I smiled. “Why not wipe out existence, that would be quicker ? ”

He studied me with a fixed and measuring judgment. “Don't you know that the way of wisdom

is to eradicate the desire for individual existence, and to extirpate the longing for personal identity ? ”

“ No, I don't know that.”

“ You have not studied Eastern Philosophy ? ”

“ Pardon me, I have studied it in the East.”

His eyes blinked. He was taken aback. I waited for him to speak. “ They have blundered out there,” he said, after drinking some wine, “ but the fakirs and the gurus know the truth. You must not judge a religion by the dregs of the people. The highest wisdom lies in destroying within one's self the desire for personal existence, in fact all desire of any kind whatsoever. No man is happy until he has ceased to care whether he is happy or miserable. No man is good until he does not know whether he is good or bad. And no man is deserving of Nirvana until he has ceased to desire existence.”

“ I know very well that philosophy of pessimism,” I replied ; “ and I have seen its fruits. I have seen temples which are cesspools of iniquity. I have seen a sacred literature which is a veritable Bedlam of obscenity. And everywhere in the country of that religion I have seen the poor shamefully ill-treated, the weak trodden under foot, the suffering and the sick unvisited by doctor or nurse, the wounded or starving animal left to die in its misery—the whole round of life ignorant, dirty, and afflicted. That

Eastern Philosophy has some charming sentiments here and there—particularly in European translations—but its fruit is the fruit of hell.”

He stared at me with anger and smouldering fury. “Are you a Christian ? ” he asked contemptuously. I bowed my head.

Then he leaned across the table, and very quickly, and with no little eloquence, poured out such a violent attack upon the principles of Christianity as made me think him to be mad. I do not know when I ever heard intellectual hate so ring and vibrate in a man’s voice.

When he had made an end, I said to him : “ But what remains ? ”

“ A charnel-house of superstitions and duperies ! ” he answered, with a snort.

“ Nothing else ? ”

“ Nothing at all.”

“ Is the Character of Christ nothing ? ”

“ The priests have destroyed it.”

“ Why,” I said to him, “ don’t you know that in the East the Character of Christ is already conquering the millions of Hinduism ? ”

“ Pooh ! ” he ejaculated wrathfully. “ Rice Christians ! Pariahs and Outcasts ! Any fool can buy as many as he chooses.”

“ I am not speaking of converts. I am speaking

of Hindus. Don't you know—has nobody told you—that the Hindus themselves are now building hospitals for the sick, that they are visiting the poor, that they are befriending the casteless, that they are cultivating the spirit of love and kindness which you denounce? The Churches have not won the peoples of Hinduism. But from the Churches those peoples have assimilated the Christian ethic. In other words, the Character of Christ, which has conquered the West, is now conquering the East. Hinduism retains its name, but the spirit is the Spirit of Christ."

He folded up his newspaper, and called for his bill. "Let me beg you," he said, "to read Nietzsche."

"I would ask you one question," I said. "Are you untouched in any way by the miracle which has occurred to-day? Are you, I mean, utterly unconscious that a miracle has happened?"

"I have said that I foretold it."

"But you do not consider yourself its cause?"

"I did not say that I considered myself its cause."

"Whence is it? Can you say?"

He lifted his eyebrows and gazed over my head. "It proceeds," he said, "from the Mahatmas in its highest manifestations. Its lower manifestations—

this love and charity—are the perversions of the demons.”

“That satisfies you ? ”

“That satisfies me.”

“Then I will tell you something that may help to give you light. This miracle is simply the conviction in the souls of good men and good women that the God of Love revealed by Christ is the Ultimate Reality. They know now what hitherto they have only endeavoured to believe. Prove to them that there is no God, and this miracle will so utterly cease that not all the Mahatmas in the world will be able to restore its impulse. The miracle is *knowledge of that God in Whom standeth our eternal life*. It belongs to God. Without God it could not be. Have you thought,” I asked earnestly, “what it would mean to you if *you* believed in a God of Love ? Have you ever contemplated that thought ? Is there no sense of lack and incompleteness in yourself, no disharmony, no feeling of disquiet and unrest ? Are you at unity with yourself ?—at home in the universe ? ”

He surveyed me with a sudden wildness of misgiving. He rose from his chair hastily. Then he stopped and considered.

“I believed once in such a God,” he replied slowly and unwillingly, “but I lost my faith.”

“Forgive me,” I said, “but it is impossible to lose faith in God. Faith is eternal. Men only lose faith in dogmas concerning God.”

He regarded me with a brooding sorrow. “Men can lose faith in God,” he said darkly, “even the most utter faith.”

“How can they lose such faith ? ” I asked.

“By sin,” he answered, as though the words were torn from him.

And before I could say another word, before I could call to him that he had not lost his faith, that he was indeed tormented by the conviction of God’s existence, he passed quickly between the tables and out of the room.

A sound of loud triumphant music came suddenly from the outer world. I was near the door. Before I had reached the street half the people in the restaurant and many of the waiters were pressing behind me. I was driven forward, borne through the crowds on the pavement and carried right into the ranks of an enormous host marching through the midnight streets. Just ahead of me went a numerous band playing “Onward, Christian Soldiers ! ” Behind them followed a host of clergymen, among whom I noticed the Bishop of Brompton, Dr. Garth, and several well-known ministers, both Anglican and Nonconformist. After these prominent clergy

marched the vast general host, into whose ranks I had been borne by the pressure of the crowd. I looked about me as well as I could, and saw that for the most part this army of London represented the young men of the great city. The man next to me said that he belonged to an Athletic Association attached to a Wesleyan Mission. He told me that they had cleared that night the streets and music-halls of London of their ancient shame. The man on my other side, a member of the Church of England Men's Society, said that he had worked with thousands of others to clear the streets of tramps and to rescue children. No less than six brass bands were following behind us, they said; the procession was estimated to be four miles in length; the objective was St. Paul's Cathedral. "It's a National Thanksgiving!" cried the Athlete; "a spontaneous Thanksgiving for the Day that is going to save England."

We arrived at St. Paul's Cathedral a minute or two before the clock struck twelve. The Bishop of London, surrounded by clergy, stood on the topmost step in the shadow of the great doorway. Below him was massed the first band. Behind the band flowed an immense multitude as far as eye could see—an ocean of souls, each one conscious of God in the solitude of its isolation. The sight of all those

young vigorous clean-limbed, pure-minded, and upright men gathered together in the gloom of great warehouses and facing towards the dark mass of the Cathedral, the thought of that innumerable ocean of individual souls filled with enthusiasm for God and His Righteousness, stirred in me a feeling of exultation that was half patriotic and half religious. It was like the full glad strength of a great and mighty nation—a nation of which a righteous man might be proud—mustering at the trumpet of God. One was literally thrilled by the spectacle. Nothing I have ever seen so moved me with a sense of the strength and power of Holiness.

The band played “O God, our help in ages past.” Midnight struck as thousands of voices filled the air with that noble hymn. Then the Bishop, with lifted hand, led the people in “Our Father.” The thunder of the voices, like volley-fire, passed from clause to clause, and ceased suddenly upon the Amen. In a deep stillness the Bishop pronounced the Blessing. A moment after the people had said Amen, the band struck up the National Anthem, and once more the air was filled with the mighty sound of men’s voices singing to God. It seemed to me that England might now justly call herself Christian England. . . .

I was nearing Hertford Street on my way home

when I saw, twenty yards in front of me and moving rapidly in my direction, the man I had encountered in the restaurant. A poor woman with a child in her arms came towards him out of a doorway, begging. He passed her, brushed past her, but suddenly checked and turned round. I saw him give her money, and as I passed him he was saying, "I am sorry for you, I am sorry for your child ; and if you are dishonest and your poverty is a trick I am still more sorry for you."

He crossed the road, without seeing me, and hurried into the darkness.

That was the last incident I witnessed on the day that changed the world.

CHAPTER XXI

WAS IT A MIRACLE ?

I HAVE told the reader that once again I was destined to see the Vision of the Child. It does not fall within the province of this book to narrate that experience, but I cannot pass to the final remarks which compose the present chapter and bring my personal chronicle to an end, without at least some indication of the nature and the consequences of that mysterious appearance. I saw the Child three months after the day of the Visitation. The Vision presented itself in the drawing-room of a London house filled with people. By this phenomenon I was led to make acquaintance with the lady who is now my wife. Through my wife I have come to the work—a work for international peace—which now engages all my energy. The child born to us a month ago seems to me like the twin-soul of the babe who died.

“ Wonder is the basis of Worship : the reign of

wonder is perennial, indestructible in Man ; only at certain stages it is, for some short season, a reign *in partibus infidelium*." I do not presume to explain the mystery of the Visitation. More congenial is it to my temperament and my spiritual nature to lose myself without question or curiosity in the abyss of wonder which at all times and in all places surrounds the conscious soul and inspires its worship. But since so many men have set out to explain the Visitation on rationalistic grounds, and since my book is written to prove the reasonableness of supposing a divine genesis for this mystery, I would venture a few valedictory remarks on the character and necessity of the miracle.

In a certain sense the Visitation may indeed be regarded as no miracle at all. One may aver that at many points it is analogous to the very common human experience of awaking only at the death of some person dear to us in a thousand ways to the full beauty and the extreme loveliness of his nature. Very true, I think, are those words which I have set at the beginning of my chronicle : " The imagination of most men lags behind their knowledge, and it is often long before the real meaning dawns upon them of what they think they know, and in a sense do know." The history of human evolution is an account of the soul's gradual and

difficult awakening from the drowsiness of slumber. Man has seen always the same world, but from age to age he has seen it with clearer eyes. From the first hours when our shadowy ancestors looked with the eyes of animals upon a territory still tortured with the birthmarks of Chaos and Anarchy, down to the beginning of the twentieth century after Christ when men spoke to each other across the waste of waters without visible means of communication—how different, how vastly different, have been the images impressed upon the retina of the human eye. The same world presented itself to the gaze of the first man as now presents itself to the astronomer and the geologist; and the centuries dividing them have passed in a gradual awakening from stupor, a gradual appreciation of truth, a gradual realisation of reality.

“It is often long before the *real meaning* dawns upon them of what they think they know, *and in a sense do know.*” The profound truth of this remark applies to the spiritual as well as the physical world. Men have used the word “God” from the beginning of time; they have used it racially, tribally, universally; they have exalted it and degraded it; they have meant by it a hundred different contradictory things. Even when the Son of Man gave to that term a meaning so august, beautiful,

and adorable that a new era at once began for humanity, there have been hosts of men professing to follow in His steps who have employed the Name of God to do the work of the Devil. One can hardly read old sermons without impatience. The Inquisitors of Spain believed in God. The Calvinists believed in God. The hooligan Orangemen believe in God.

The *real meaning* of this majestic word has been stealing upon the consciousness of humanity from the dawn of time. In our own day, helped by the sublime revelations of pure science, the meaning of that word has broadened and extended in an understanding enlarged by the work of reason to comprehend its wonder. Men thought they knew there was a God, and in a sense they did know it, but their imagination lagged behind this knowledge. They had not *visualised* God. They had not apprehended the enormous significance of God's existence. They had not imagined the infinite consequences involved in the certainty of the truth of God's existence.

Men may say, if they will, that no miracle has occurred ; that with an enlarged understanding we are now better able to entertain the conception of a God ; and that imagination, dazzled and staggered by the thought of a real and actual God, has pro-

duced the change in the world which is now apparent to everybody. They may contend that the fact of so many people coming simultaneously to a full realisation of the significance for humanity of God's existence is merely coincidence.

I shall not quarrel with them.

The thought I would leave with the reader has nothing to do with my own experience. I have told what happened to me because I felt it my duty to do so. Whether those who read my narrative believe or not, is of no serious account either to me or to themselves. But it is, I think, most important that those who live now in a world conscious of God, in a world ruled by the conviction of immortality, in a world which has realised that the word love *involves infinite consequences*, should at least honestly confront the thought of what threatened civilisation before this awakening occurred.

There is no doubt that history at the time of the Visitation was at one of those crises which culminate either in a reversion to savagery or in a fresh and violent impulse towards salvation. Not only were the foremost nations of mankind threatened with bankruptcy merely by maintaining a state of peace more costly than war, and not only was there imminent peril for European culture and the Christian religion in the awakening of Eastern nations

who watched our quarrels with covetous eyes, but in the individual soul of the European there was an *ennui*, a fatigue, a boredom, an indifference to seriousness, a contempt for reverence and wonder, which was infinitely more perilous than the jealous enmity of hostile savages or semi-savages.

One looks back upon the literature of that period with consternation. Adultery was the theme of most novels and most plays. One looks back upon the newspapers with amazement. Crime was the main interest, hysterics the prevailing mood. One looks back upon the politics of that time with alarm and terror. The nation was quarrelling furiously, like so many hungry wolves, over the barest decencies of life.

When it is remembered that certain leaders of the *Conservative Party* fomented rebellion among the most ignorant and fanatical people of Ireland, and at a time when the underworld of labour was talking fiercely of violence and rebellion, when one remembers this, I think there can be no doubt that society was in a dire peril. And with this, too, it must be borne in mind that a veritable madness for violence had manifested itself among women, so that such frightful crimes as arson were actually attempted and apparently countenanced by ladies of influence. That there was no outburst of popular indignation

at these hideous and incredible crimes of frenzied women is another proof, surely, of the national peril.

Furthermore, one must steadily contemplate the extraordinary, the now almost unthinkable relations which existed between the various classes of the community. It may be said that the three great classes of the community lived without contact. The rich inhabited one world : the middle-class inhabited another world : the hand-labourers inhabited another world still. Rich men lived in the most sumptuous fashion when others were starving for want of work. Landowners, possessing thousands of acres of English country, used their estates chiefly for amusement, and made no effort whatever to develop their responsibilities. Middle-class people amassed enormous fortunes by exploiting the labour of the poor. Titles were literally to be purchased at the hands of either political party. Aristocracy, asking no questions, opened its doors to plutocracy, however vulgar and dishonest. Such was the condition of things, as one writer said, that when the newspapers announced the visit of the King to a wealthy grocer no one was surprised in the very least, while society's breath would have been taken away by a royal visit to some poor scholar or some illustrious savant.

Money, in fact, was the one god of that period. The worship of Mammon was open, frank, and thorough. Democracy, justly waking to the miseries of its environment and to the injustice of its reward, considered that all its problems would be solved by more money. In Mr. Lloyd George they found a statesman who combined imagination with a singular acuteness of intellect. Mr. Lloyd George, setting out to redress the wrongs of democracy, found his way challenged and the first steps of his progress impeded by the whole army of privilege. Stung by the vulgar taunts levelled at him on account of his humble origin, and really indignant at the appalling selfishness revealed by those who enjoyed the comforts and luxuries of enormous wealth in an age of squalor and wretchedness, this statesman abandoned appeal and persuasion for challenge, denunciation, and scornful threats. He had accomplished more for democracy in a few years than both parties had brought into being over the whole history of democratic government ; but there is little doubt that he was in grave danger at the moment of the Visitation of becoming, if not a firebrand, at least one of those dangerous men who believe that politics can solve problems which belong to the soul. Had the Conservative Party co-operated with him from the first to get rid of things

which palpably disgraced a civilised country and which were utterly shameful in a country professing to be Christian, there is little doubt, I think, that he would have avoided a violent rhetoric. But lack of sympathy on the part of the rich, the most unscrupulous and mendacious tactics on the part of certain disreputable Conservative newspapers, these things undoubtedly operated to injure the balance of that able mind, and to render him for those who looked ahead something of a national danger.

One can see clearly enough now that if men at that time had even faintly believed in God the movement of democracy into the sunshine, the evolution of England into an equipped and scientific state, would have been accomplished without shock or travail. But it is quite plain that men did not believe in God. Their problems, indeed, arose only from that lack of faith. The spirit of unrest which everywhere manifested itself came from the loss of the thought of God, the blindness of their eyes to the long perspective of eternity. The bitterness of political disputation, the violence of political propaganda, the extreme luxury of the very rich, the absolute destitution of the very poor, the ugliness, the barrenness, the degradation of industrial prosperity, and the insufferable insolence of literature's

contemptuous attitude towards the eternal issues of existence—all these things marked the period as an age in which the people had forgotten God and were determined to do without Him.

George Sand truly said, and now we can all realise it, that the great word of the New Testament is Love. "The word is a great one," she said, "because it involves infinite consequences. To love means to help one another, to have joint aspirations, to act in concert, to labour for the same end, to develop to its ideal consummation the fraternal instinct, thanks to which mankind have brought the earth under their dominion. Every time that he has been false to this instinct, which is his law of life, his natural destiny, man has seen his temples crumble, his societies dissolve, his intellectual sense go wrong, his moral sense die out. The future is founded on love."

Who can doubt it now ?

We look back on a discordant, godless world tearing itself to pieces and foaming at the mouth in its denial of brotherhood, we see the face of that world marked by the fury and blackness of anger, its feet sliding from under it on the slippery places of hateful conflict, its body bending and breaking under the strain of its own determination to live without God ; and then we turn to this new world already

shining with love, dignified with reverence, and tranquil with the vision of Eternity—this new world in which the fraternal instinct is the supreme law of man's life, in which men rejoice to bear one another's burdens, in which no little child is left to perish in sin and misery, in which art and literature rise once more into the empyrean of divine imagination, from which ugliness is banished as well as want and crime, in which beauty is felt to be a passion and expectation of heaven, the one satisfying thirst of the soul—we look from the old world upon this new world which our children now happily inhabit with no memory of another, and surely we must bow ourselves with grateful thanksgiving and acknowledge with reverent conviction that, whether by miracle or no miracle, God has indeed visited and redeemed His people.

It is said of a French philosopher that the death of a lifelong friend *humanised him for one day*. For one day those who believed in God lived as if their belief was true. And the result of that one day changed the face of the whole world

